The Catholic University of America

Philosophical Studies No. 239

MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ACCORDING TO A. D. SERTILLANGES, O.P.

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Philosophy

of The Catholic University of America in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Sister Edward Butler, D.W.

Washington, D.C.

1968

This dissertation was approved by J. M. Bowman

Professor of Philosopher, as director, and by

Robert Paul McKeon and Paul K. K. Tong

as readers

Nihil Obstat:

Reverend Bernardine M. Bonansea, O.F.M.
Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur:

Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle
Archbishop of Washington

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the nihil obstat and the imprimatur agree with the content, opinions, or statements expressed.

Copyright by

Sister Edward Butler, D.W.

1969

TO OUR LADY, MOTHER OF INCARNATE WISDOM,

WHOSE LIGHT AND LOVE HAVE BROUGHT

THIS WORK TO COMPLETION,

AND TO MY PARENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter

I. SERTILLANGES' INTERPRETATION OF THE FIVE WAYS 4

A. General Approach to the Proof of God
B. The Nature of Theodicy
C. The Five ways of St. Thomas
1. First way
2. Second way
3. Third way
4. Fourth way
5. Fifth way
D. Conclusion

II. SUPPLEMENTARY PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD 25

A. Approach to God--1905
1. Universal consent
2. Sources of universal consent
3. Contemporary objections
B. Approach to God--1933
1. Metaphysical arguments
2. Moral arguments
3. Atheism
C. Conclusion

III. MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ACCORDING TO SERTILLANGES . . . 63

A. God's Cognoscibility
1. Man's way of knowing
2. The value of man's knowledge of God
3. The safeguard of human knowledge of God
B. Opposition to Sertillanges' Interpretation
1. Gardair
2. Romeyer
3. Manser
4. Penido
5. Descoqs
6. Maritain
C. Conclusion

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Continued

Chapter — Page

IV. GOD AND CREATION 93

A. Creation and Beginning
B. The Eternity or Non-eternity of the World
1. Eternal creation and revelation
2. Inconclusive arguments for the eternity of the world
3. Inconclusive arguments for the non-eternity of the world
C. Creation
Nature
Possibility
Purpose
A "certain relation"
Characteristics
D. Conservation
E. Creation and Some Philosophical Problems
1. Matter
2. Efficient and final causality
3. Providence
4. Contingency and freedom
5. Miracles
F. Conclusion

V. GOD AND EVIL 124

A. The Nature of Evil
B. The Origin of Evil
C. Some Objections
D. Mystery
E. Conclusion

VI. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION 140

A. Summary
B. Evaluation
1. Purpose
2. Reply to some critics
C. Conclusion

BIBLIOGRAPHY 154

INTRODUCTION

The question of man's knowledge of God is a perennial problem that man tries to solve by myth, by metaphysics and by religion. The narrow path between anthropomorphism and agnosticism is difficult to discover and even more difficult to follow. Nevertheless, more comprehensive knowledge concerning the existence and the nature of God is man's constant quest. Every scholarly effort to clarify this problem is worthy of consideration, for it can further man's search for more adequate answers to the questions: (1) Is there a God? (2) What is God?

Among the outstanding interpreters of the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas is the French Dominican, Antonin Dalmatius Sertillanges. Born in Clermont-Ferrand on November 16, 1863, he received his early education from the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In 1883 he entered the French Dominican novitiate, which had been moved to Belmonte in Spain because of the anti-religious laws then in force in France. In 1888, Sertillanges was ordained in Corbara, Spain, where he secured his doctorate and remained for three more years as professor of theology

Father Sertillanges became managing editor of La revue thomiste in Paris in 1895. Five years later he was named professor of philosophy at the Institut Catholique of Paris, and through his lectures and writings soon became one of the leading Thomistic scholars. In 1918 Sertillanges was elected a member of the Institut de France, accept-

ing a seat in the section devoted to the moral and political sciences. He was decorated with the Legion of Honor in 1934, and in 1935 the Dominican Order conferred on him the title of preacher general. On June 26, 1948, Father Sertillanges died suddenly in Salanches, Savoy, while completing his last great project, a work in two volumes on the problem of evil.

Philosopher, theologian, spiritual director, historian, poet and painter, Père Sertillanges turned his pen to many fields over a span of more than fifty years. Acknowledged by Penido as one of the "princes of neo-Thomism," Sertillanges has been a leader in the adaptation and renovation of Thomistic doctrine. He was particularly concerned with freeing philosophy from all traces of anthropomorphism. In relentlessly exposing anthropomorphic thought Sertillanges has interpreted St. Thomas' approach to God in a way that is both stimulating and provocative.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate Sertillanges' teaching on man's knowledge of God. The method followed is an analytic exposition of Sertillanges' thought as contained in books and articles that he has written revealing his philosophical approach to God. Those books by Sertillanges used most extensively for this study include: La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, Les sources de la croyance en Dieu, Dieu our rien, Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme, La création et ses retentissements en philosophie and Le problème du mal. Other books considered include: Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste, Catéchisme des incroyants, Le christianisme et les philosophies, Dieu gouverne and L'univers et l'âme. It is regrettable that only one

of these books, Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste, is available in English under the title of Foundations of Thomistic Philosophy. Unless otherwise stated selections translated from books or articles are those of the writer.

This investigation includes first, an analysis of Père Sertillanges' interpretation of the traditional five ways as well as other proofs for the existence of God proposed by him. Consideration is then given to his teaching concerning man's knowledge of the nature of God and to the principal objections against it. Sertillanges has extensively treated of two topics intimately related to the problem of God: creation and evil. An authentic notion of creation sheds light on the nature of the creator; likewise, any approach to the problem of evil is founded upon a doctrine concerning the existence and nature of God. To gain further insight into his teaching on the cognoscibility of God, a study is thus made of Sertillanges' writing on creation and evil. Finally, our study will conclude with an evaluation of Sertillanges' interpretation of the Thomistic teaching of man's knowledge of God.

The writer wishes to take this occasion to thank all those who helped her in the preparation of this work, especially the Reverend Bernadine M. Bonansea, O.F.M., Ph.D., Lect. Glis., as director, and all the Daughters of Wisdom who encouraged her and made her studies at the Catholic University of America possible.

CHAPTER I

SERTILLANGES' INTERPRETATION OF THE FIVE WAYS OF ST. THOMAS

The Thomistic proofs for the existence of God are the source of endless investigation and discussion. In their attempt to discover the origin of the proofs, philosophers examine the historical background of Thomas' writing where the proofs are contained and try to ascertain the significance of their number and mode of presentation. They argue for and against the validity of the five ways and question whether they amount to five different proofs or only to one general proof. It is safe to say that in discussing the quinque viae almost every Thomistic philosopher of renown has his own personal interpretation of them.

A. General Approach to the Proof of God

Père Sertillanges has a twofold approach to the theistic proofs of his master, St. Thomas. As a metaphysician, he first probes them for their ultimate significance. This line of thought is to be found principally in his synthesis of Thomistic philosophy, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, in a more popular presentation of Thomas' main themes, Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste, and to a lesser extent in his history of philosophy, Le christianisme et

les philosophies. A number of articles for philosophical reviews are also metaphysical considerations of the proofs.[1] His second approach is conditioned by his desire to present a convincing popular proof. Sertillanges wrote Les sources de la croyance en Dieu and Dieu ou rien to meet the needs of those who would profit more from a metaphysics that is wedded to every day thought.[2] He also offers a popular approach to the problem of the existence of God in Catéchisme des incroyants. This chapter will be limited to a study of Sertillanges' purely metaphysical considerations concerning the proofs for God's existence.

It is not unusual for philosophers to reduce the five proofs to one. Garrigou-Lagrange offers a general proof that includes all others and that is based on the principle, "The greater cannot proceed from the less; only the higher grade of being explains the lower."[3] Van Steenberghen dismisses the five ways as incomplete and maintains that an adequate demonstration of the existence of God must establish the existence of an absolute reality that is beyond the realm of finite beings.[4]

---

[1]A. D. Sertillanges, "A propos des preuves de Dieu. La troisième "voie" thomiste," Revue de philosophie, XXV (1925), 24-37; "Le P. Descoqs et la 'tertia via'"; Revue thomiste, IX (1926), 490-502; "Sur la démonstrabilité de Dieu. Comment on prouve Dieu," Revue apologétique, XLVI (1928), 385-395, 515-521.

[2]A. D. Sertillanges, Dieu ou rien (Paris: Flammarion, 1933) I, 20.

[3]Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, God: His Existence and His Nature, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1934), I, 251-261.

[4]Fernand van Steenberghen, "Le problème philosophique de Dieu," Revue philosophique de Louvain, XLV (1947), 301-313.

Gilson reasons that the five proofs amount to a search beyond existences that are not self-sufficient for an existence that is self-sufficient and thus the first cause of all.[1] Sertillanges, too, believes that all the proofs lead to one, God as the source of being. In seeking the first source it is impossible to ignore the most general of effects, being itself. If being as being did not require a source, there would be no need for God, since particular causes can explain the particular effects of experience. Particular effects lead to a first source because each effect contains a value of being.[2] God is here considered as the principle of being and is called mover, cause, necessary being, perfect and simple subject, orderer because the effects connoted by these names are an expansion of the only notion that counts in metaphysics, the notion of being.[3]

In Le christianisme et les philosophies, a later work, Sertillanges offers a somewhat similar approach. The world is evidently a causal chain, a conditioning, he says, and we seek the first link, the first condition, the source of the manifestations and activities around

---

[1]Etienne Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, trans. L. K. Shock (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 81.

[2]A. D. Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin (Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée de St. Thomas d'Aquin; Paris: Aubier, 1940), I, 130.

"Si l'être en tant que tel, n'avait pas besoin de source, on n'aurait pas besoin de Dieu, les causes particulières étant là pour expliquer les effets particuliers que donne l'expérience. Si de ceux-ci on peut s'élever pourtant à la Première Source, c'est donc parce qu'en chacun est incluse à titre sécial, mais très réellement, une valeur non plus particulière, mais générale, une valeur d'être."

[3]Ibid.

us and within us. Though the application of the principle of causality we proceed from cause to cause, from condition to condition. There can be no regression to infinity, since conditioning would be impossible if there were no unconditioned conditions; therefore, a first must be posited. Analyzing this first, we recognize that in order to play its role this first must be both immanent and transcendent, outside of the categories, outside of being itself taken as embracing categories and essences.[1] We call God this first whose affirmation and existence is inevitably demanded by the scale of actions, causes, contingencies and necessities, values, and ends.[2]

In Foundations of Thomistic Philosophy Sertillanges presents a synthesis of the five proofs. Everything experienced seems to belong to a chain of existing things, implying and succeeding one another. There is evident in the universe an immense conditioning as a result of which being and its perfections exist in different degrees, with different mutual relationships and different forms. We necessarily seek primordial sources, the first beings, perfections and reasons of everything. The first supplies everything in a series of causes. A conditioning is composed essentially of a source, channels, and an effect. Without a source the channels are meaningless and the effect non-existent. In

---

[1]A. D. Sertillanges, Le christianisme et les philosophies (Paris: Aubier, n.d.), I, 260.
"Mais en analysant cette condition de premier, comme l'a fait longuement saint Thomas dans le Compendium theologiae et dans bien d'autres passages, nous arrivons à reconnaître que pour jouer son rôle il doit être à la fois immanent et transcendant, hors les catégories, hors de l'être même pris comme accolade des catégories et des essences ..."

[2]Ibid., I, 261.

studying a series of phenomena to discover its source or cause we must consider dependence in nature rather than succession in time. In such a series the first cause actually accounts for the last effect.[1]

First sources cannot be denied; reason and science demand them. If they are to be accepted as first, they must show such properties that their existence, activity, and perfection find justification without recourse to anything else, that is, they must be necessary. Further analysis and deduction will reveal all the perfections that necessary being must have, and thus we reach God. For the word God in its highest acceptation means a unique being embracing every perfection. Thus, the two questions, Is there a God? and, Can we know Him? coincide. To be, for God, is to be a necessary being, a first, essential, absolute, independent being.[2] "And we know that there must be a necessary being in this sense, because, like an axle which remains stationary when the wheel revolves, it is the starting-point, the foundation, the inevitable condition of whatsoever is."[3]

B. The Nature of Theodicy

The conviction that the questions of the existence of God and our knowledge of Him coincide lies at the heart of Sertillanges' views concerning the nature of theodicy. According to him natural theology is part of general metaphysics, since it is one and the same science that treats of both an object and its principles. There is no natural

---

[1]A. D. Sertillanges, Foundations of Thomistic Philosophy, trans. Godfrey Anstruther (London: Sands and Co,, 1931), pp. 65-69.

[2]Ibid., pp. 70-73. [3]Ibid., p. 73.

theology outside of general metaphysics.[1] The study of being in its various manifestations must lead to its first cause.

> In truth, the matter [subjectum] that is treated in metaphysics even under the name of theodicy, angelology or rational psychology, is neither God, nor the soul, nor separated substances, but only being in general, of which God, the soul and separated substances are the first causes.[2]

Sertillanges sees the entire Thomistic teaching as an extended treatise of God, theodicy being only a framework. "Everything else is really there [in theodicy] and is deduced from it, and everything comes back to it."[3]

Theodicy is the framework of Thomistic doctrine, but the nature of theodicy itself is but an extended proof of the existence of God. That the task of Aquinas' theodicy is essentially the proof of God is a fundamental idea in the mind of Sertillanges and one to which he reverts time and again over a span of more than thirty years.

In 1906

> The whole of natural theodicy in the eyes of St. Thomas--and he repeats it unceasingly--is only an answer to this question: an Deus sit.[4]

---

[1] Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 22.

[2] A. D. Sertillanges, "La science et les sciences spéculatives d'après s. Thomas d'Aquin," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, X (1921), 16.
"A vrai dire, la matière (subjectum) dont on traite en métaphysique même sous le nom de théodicée, d'angélologie ou de psychologie rationnelle, ce n'est ni Dieu, ni l'âme, ni les substances séparées, mais l'être en général, dont Dieu, l'âme et les substances séparées sont les causes premières."

[3] Sertillanges, Foundations . . . , p. 45.

[4] A. D. Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme?" Revue de philosophie, VIII (1906), 133.
"Toute la théodicée naturelle aux yeux de saint Thomas--et il le répète sans cesse—n'est qu'une réponse à cette question: an Deus sit."

1925

> And do we not know, once again, that the whole of rational theodicy is only a long paraphrase of the proofs given at the beginning, a detailed and varied explanation of the short sentence: God is?[1]

In 1931

> Hence we may say that theodicy is only one long proof of the existence of God. St. Thomas says so incessantly insisting that it does nothing but answer the question whether God is (an sit). As for God's nature (quid sit), St. Thomas declares it to be inaccessible. . . .[2]

In 1940

> But we know that it is the whole of natural theodicy that has as mission to integrate the proof of God.[3]

It is Sertillanges' belief that the work of the philosopher in natural theology is to establish by deduction all the conclusions that can be drawn concerning the source of all being.[4] Once the existence of a first cause is established, all its attributes can be successively demonstrated. In fact, all that can be known concerning the first cause is only an explanation of the necessity of positing it.[5] In a certain

---

[1]Saint Thomas d'Aquin, Somme théologique, Vol. I: Dieu, traduction française par A.D. Sertillanges (Paris: Desclés et Cie., 1926), p. 347.

"Et ne sait-on pas, encore une fois, que toute la théodicée rationelle n'est qu'une longue paraphrase des preuves données au départ, une explication circonstanciée et diverse de cette courte phrase: Dieu est?"

[2]Sertillanges, Foundations . . . , pp. 73-74.

[3]Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 131.
"Mais on sait que c'est toute la théodicée naturelle qui a pour mission d'intégrer la preuve de Dieu."

[4]Sertillanges, Foundations . . . , p. 73.

[5]Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 152.

sense, according to Sertillanges, it would be better to discuss the attributes of God before proving that He exists. St. Thomas explains that in the proof of God the means of demonstration is a nominal definition. Thus, except for reasons of pedagogy, the proof could proceed by showing what God must be and then conclude that such a being is necessary.[1]

C. The Five Ways of St. Thomas

1. First Way

La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin is the only work where Sertillanges considers each of the Thomistic proofs separately and at some length. In setting forth St. Thomas' first way from motion, Sertillanges begins by making it clear that the motion in question includes not only local change but also qualitative change. In fact, he maintains that this proof is of such a general nature that it embraces changes that are not motion properly so-called but analogous to it, thus allowing for the consideration in this proof of the activity of intellect and will.[2]

As he presents the thought of St. Thomas, Sertillanges takes into account objections that would be foremost in the minds of his own contemporaries. Thus he introduces the fact that the philosophical position of absolute subjectivism poses no threat to the proof from change. Even if one sees in change only appearances, these appearances change and their variations must be considered real and thus subject to the general conditions of being. Likewise, a metaphysical

---

[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., I, 131.

dynamism would encompass relative becoming and so require the same conditions of being though differently expressed.[1]

In earlier editions of La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, Sertillanges remarks that in view of modern findings this first proof could be examined at great length, but he does not do so. In the final edition he briefly discusses two modern scientific positions. The physicist does not look upon natural phenomena as resulting from one being thrust against another. For him all is solidarity, and every action is a quest for the equilibrium of the whole. This theory, nevertheless, admits of becoming and this becoming is conditioned; to seek these conditions is the principal role of science. These conditions are hierarchic and science discovers the laws of this gradation and seeks the effects and sources of energy. If, on the other hand, as some hold, the universe is a unity in which the plurality of causes and effects is only an analytical sifting, this theory changes nothing. Analysis has its foundation in reality and informs of the nature of the whole and aids in a resolution and integration in more mysterious forms.[2]

Finally, Sertillanges discusses the fundamental difficulty that St. Thomas had to answer. In his day natural movement was proposed against the principle: Whatever is moved is moved by another. Today we would speak of the spontaneous activity of matter. In answer it may be said that a body moves itself but not by itself, that is, it moves because of its nature but the nature itself must be accounted for. Natures manifest a double dependence, that of immediate agents and that

---

[1] Ibid., I, 132. [2] Ibid., I, 134-135.

of general influences. Both collaborate in the generating of a nature, but once the generation is complete only the general influences condition the being. When the effect is produced the immediate agent is no longer necessary; general causes continue the work, actually moving the nature. The consideration of natural activities eventually leads to God.[1]

At the end of his discussion on the first way Sertillanges reaffirms his position concerning the nature of theodicy. Having arrived at this first that moves and is not moved, he declares that further reasoning must show that this unmoved mover is not a kind of demiurge but the God of the Christians. The quality of unmoved mover implies that of pure act, and the development of the notion of pure act suffices to unfold the whole of natural theology. Postponing this step is not a lack of method, since the whole of theodicy answers the one question: Is there a God? For this reason there is logical unity between that which has been presented and that which is to come.[2]

2. Second Way

The exposition of the second way affords Sertillanges the opportunity of interpreting some Kantian positions in the light of St. Thomas' teaching. Sertillanges states that Kant uses the reasoning of the second antinomy.[3] He continues to elaborate on this as follows: the idea of a conditioning implies one conditioning and one being conditioned. To say that everything is conditioned is to render the series meaningless. It is clear, according to Sertillanges, that such reasoning is not

---

[1] Ibid., I, 134-135. [2] Ibid., I, 135. [3] Ibid., I, 136.

associated with a regress in time but is an actual analysis of the conditions of each effect. A whole causal series comes to light in which each intermediate cause is such only through being caused itself, and so there must be posited an independent cause that will be the true cause because of the instrumental diffusion of its activity.[1]

Kant, like St. Thomas, sees that there must be a first only if there is subordination, one condition depending on another for its causal action. In agreement with Aquinas, Kant explains that the conditions and their causal linking are supposed in the conditioning under consideration and that they must be given with it. As for a coordinated series it does not matter whether the series is finite or not, since this is related to the finiteness of the action. Kant did not see, however, that successions in time, like generation, are instances of coordinating causes and by these successions a beginning of the world and time cannot be proved.[2]

A more significant Kantian contention upheld by some contemporary thinkers represents an attack on the principle of causality. In this view causality can apply only to the relative and it is an abuse to extend it to relate the cosmos to a transcendent cause. Sertillanges finds a sufficient answer to this charge in the thought of St. Albert the Great who, as a physicist, considers this question. St. Albert maintains that properly speaking God cannot be treated as a cause since as transcendent He is beyond all the categories. However, as a result of a

---

[1] Ibid., I. 136-137. [2] Ibid., I, 137-138.

consideration of causes and the necessity of closing the series the existence of God is postulated. Sertillanges explains that it is not a question of Voltaire's watch and watchmaker, since this is a proportion, whereas the relation between the absolute and the relative is a disproportion. The quest in Thomistic thought is not for an exterior agent, rather it is an ascent from cause to cause in search of a first that is not caused. If it becomes necessary to posit a cause that is both immanent and transcendent, this does not invalidate the procedure.[1]

3. Third Way

Of all the proofs, Sertillanges gives that concerning the possible and the necessary the shortest treatment in La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin. He states that it is not a new proof except for its point of view, that of constituted being. Whether being as such or an effect or a becoming is considered, the search is always for a condition. It becomes evident both that the quest must go beyond what is under consideration and that the regress cannot be an infinite one. A first is reached and the divine character attributed to it. It is always conditioning that is in question and the unconditioned that is attained.[2]

Although this treatment of the third way is brief, Sertillanges looks upon it as the central argument. The third way treats of constituted being, while the first two lead to it as becoming leads to constituted being and as its conditions lead to the conditions of being. Similarly, the last two ways can be reduced to the third, since the

---

[1] Ibid., 138-139. [2] Ibid., I, 140.

fourth merely develops the notion of being in its highest aspects and the fifth gives being its completion through the finality that is its term. In calling the third way the central argument Sertillanges adds the qualification that this is true insofar as its foundation, constituted being, is concerned. He makes this restriction because of the physical nature of the proof as presented in the Summa theologica. Sertillanges believes that in the Summa contra gentes (I, 15) the proof is more metaphysical because St. Thomas avoids referring to the idea of nothing, a weakening element in the discussion in the Summa theologica.[1]

In meeting the objections to the third way proposed by Geny[2] and seconded by Descoqs,[3] two prominent scholastics of his time, Sertillanges more fully elaborates his thoughts, which he claims were given in dry formulas in La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin. It is significant that, although Geny makes major attacks on both the third and fourth ways, Sertillanges concerns himself with defending the third one only.

Geny admires as a masterpiece of clarity and forcefulness the argument from contingency presented in the Summa contra gentes (I, 15). But he finds two difficulties of considerable import in the first part

---

[1] Ibid., I, 140-141.

[2] Paul Geny, "A propos des preuves thomistes de l'existence de Dieu," Revue de philosophie, XXIV (1924), 575-601.

[3] Pedro Descoqs, "Les derniers écrits du P. Geny," Archives de philosophie, III (1925), 96-137.

of the proof as St. Thomas formulates it in the Summa theologica. According to Geny, the proof is so expressed that it becomes necessary to prove that if at a certain time the universe had contained only generable and corruptible beings, actually there would no longer be anything at all because everything would have ceased to exist.[1] He attacks two propositions in the argument: (1) "that which is capable of not being (that which is corruptible), at a certain time ceases to be"; (2) "If then all things had been corruptibles, at a certain time there would no longer have been anything at all."[2] Why, Geny asks, must that which is corruptible necessarily corrupt? This statement is admissible with reference to living things since it is a fact of experience and since corporeal life brings with it a wearing down of organs that can never be completely regenerated. However, inanimate objects need not corrupt necessarily according to Geny. Although it be true that the history of the earth is a series of generations, it is possible to conceive of a less complicated material universe in which substantial changes would not be so numerous. Moreover, there is the possibility that some corruptible substances might not corrupt because never reached by a corrupting agent.[3]

---

[1] Geny, "A propos des preuves . . . , " p. 581.

[2] Ibid., pp. 581-582.
"Dans la démonstration, il y a encore deux articulations à distingguer: 'Ce qui est susceptible de ne pas être (ce qui est corruptible), à un certain moment cesse d'être: (1), et: 'Si donc toutes choses avaient été corruptibles, à un certain moment il n'y aurait plus rien eu du tout' (2)."

[3] Ibid., pp. 582-583.

Even if it be conceded that all that is corruptible corrupts, Geny finds greater difficulties in the second proposition. It must be proved that if at a given time the universe be composed only of corruptible things, it necessarily follows that the time will come when there will be nothing, all things having corrupted. If the corruption of one thing is the generation of another, total annihilation is impossible. Even were it to be admitted that a material being could disappear without giving rise to another, can it be asserted that every material being would eventually vanish? This supposition is based on the unproved assertion of Maimonides that what is possible for a species cannot not happen necessarily.[1]

Answering the first objection, Sertillanges maintains that the perishable perishes inevitably because of the evolutionary nature of this world. Both the animate and the inanimate are unstable composites delivered up to the forces of conflict. Whatever is subject to change changes one day, and even if a rock or a star be spared for centuries, yet having before it indefinite duration, inevitably it will succumb to change. The movement in question is not only that of exterior actions but involves the very constitution of bodies. To speak of substances corruptible per se remaining incorruptible because not reached by an agent is to ignore the mobile nature of the world of substances, "mobile by the very fact of an internal equilibrium incessantly changed so that the agent of eventual destruction is always there."[2]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 584-588.

[2] A. D. Sertillanges, "A propos des preuves de Dieu. La troisième voie," Revue de philosophie, XXV (1925), 25-29.

In defense of the second proposition Sertillanges affirms that if the antecedent is admitted, the consequent necessarily follows. He holds that the antecedent means that every being is entirely corruptible. Since this supposition is absurd, it is not surprising that Geny finds the consequent contrary to experience and impossible. In the light of Thomistic principles change requires a certain permanence that this hypothesis does not allow. The scholastic principle that the corruption of one thing is the generation of another does not apply, because the hypothesis excludes all permanence and consequently the possibility of generation. Probably Maimonides meant that the permanence of beings taken collectively was without sufficient reason. Permanent elements in nature must be recognized as well as the source of this permanence, the first cause.[1]

Sertillanges is firm in his conviction that the third proof as formulated in the Summa theologica is valid; nevertheless, he does not hesitate to admit that he finds it surprising that St. Thomas treats of nothingness as a positive entity. It would be better, Sertillanges suggests, to state that all is not perishable and then prove it by showing that in order to have change in nature there must be something permanent. Trying to find a reason for the formulation of the third proof in the Summa theologica, Sertillanges offers the theory that St. Thomas is giving a catalogue of proofs. Aquinas has in hand Maimonides' presentation of the proof and considering it valid, though subtle, he does not change it.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 31-36.

[2] A. D. Sertillanges, "Le Père Descoqs et la 'tertia via'," Revue thomiste, IX (1926), 502.

4. Fourth Way

The fourth proof in Sertillanges' opinion is ultra-metaphysical and not always understood. His presentation of the argument is as follows. The diversity of degree of participation in the transcendentals proves that the participants do not possess these perfections essentially; therefore, there must be a first that possesses essentially and as source that which is measured im others. If each participant possessed of itself the participated transcendental, the different degrees of possession in different beings would be inexplicable. On the other hand, if beings are different and if each is of itself the cause of its goodness, its perfection, its being, then it must be concluded that different causes produce the same effect. These impossible alternatives indicate that the fullness of what is participated must be sought in a first that is beyond the gradated series of participants and fully possesses as an essential property that which is participated more or less by others.[1]

Ontological participation and the principle of the one and the many underlie this proof, Sertillanges asserts. He maintains that when St. Thomas says in the Summa theologica that the maximum of any genus is the cause of the others he means not that the first participant is the cause of the others but that above the order of participation there is a first in which all others participate. The maximum mentioned is the unity of plenitude of which the rest is only emanation.[2] As proof that this is the metaphysical level of the argument and that the example

---

[1]Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 141-142.
[2]Ibid., I, 142-143.

of heat and fire does not taint the argument as such, Sertillanges offers this thought of St. Thomas.

> It must be said that all things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being more perfectly. Hence Plato said (parmen. XXVI) that unity must come before multitude: and Aristotle said (Metaph. II, text. 4) that whatever is greatest in being and greatest in truth is the cause of every being and of every truth.[1]

Plato erred along these lines in his search for the first because he sought a first not only in the order of the transcendentals but also in every species of being. He failed to see that as a result of his general law of the one and the many he would have to go beyond the Ideas to the Father of Ideas, source of the transcendent and thus of everything else.[2]

Some have seen in this proof the a priori approach of St. Ansalm. Actually, writes Sertillanges, it is founded like the others on the principle of causality. Sertillanges concedes that the fourth proof is a mere outline even to the point of being obscure and almost equivocal; it is only the beginning of the proof of God. To establish the existence of God is the work of the whole of theodicy.[3]

5. Fifth Way

In his discussion of the fifth way Sertillanges shows that there are numerous elements in it that are not immediately evident. St. Thomas chooses to consider beings that are not endowed with intelligence but only because he wishes to present a short, more evident approach.

---

[1] S.T., I, 44, 1.

[2] Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 143-144.

[3] Ibid., I, 144.

Further on in the development of the doctrine the first principle will be attained through the consideration of the will as nature and through the application of the theory of potency and act to the exercise of free will. These aspects of the question are part of the proof of God and serve to strengthen it, but their exposition is postponed on account of its abtruse character.[1]

The proof with regard to things that lack intelligence is two-fold. It rests first on the existence of natural properties, and secondly on the use that nature makes of them to constitute the order of the world. Sertillanges suggests that the notion of natural properties, more or less implicit in this proof, has not always been insisted upon. He points out that St. Thomas has given it significant consideration in several places.[2] The fact of natural properties implies finality. Without finality there would be no activity, no becoming. The end is the cause of causes and to do away with it is to arrest nature.[3]

In addition to natural properties nature also reveals order. All the elements of nature work together for the best, that is, for order. The order of nature is better than the best of its elements because it is a superior act enveloping these elements and also because it has the character of a whole, which as such is superior to its parts. Disorder is rather a proof of finality than an argument against it.[4] "There is no fault to be found, except in the case of things that

---

[1] Ibid., I, 145.

[2] S.T. I, 44, 4; I, 103, 1, 2 and 3; S.C.G. III, 2; in II Phys., Lect. xii-xv.

[3] Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 146-147.

[4] Ibid., I, 147.

are for an end. A fault is never attributed to an agent if the failure is related to something that is not the agent's end."[1]

The objection that no ends are needed because nature acts through necessity, Sertillanges likens to the statement that the arrow does not need the archer because the impulsion that moves the arrow leads it necessarily to the target. The activity of nature in its ensemble manifests harmony. Both the agents of nature and their relations tend toward order; this finality is the work of intelligence because there must be a concept of ends and the establishment of proportion between means and ends to achieve the unity of order.[2]

It would seem to many that the fifth way concludes too abruptly. The cause in question need only be sufficient to explain the effects we observe or it could be multiple instead of one and so God would not be attained. Sertillanges suggests that the proof is an abridgement. Further on in theodicy, the whole of which, he repeats, is one long proof of God, it will be shown that the immanent finality of the universe leads ultimately to a transcendent finality, to a universal end, to God.

D. Conclusion

This consideration of Sertillanges' understanding of St. Thomas' ways leaves no doubt as to his dominant convictions concerning the proof of God. He maintains that ultimately all arguments reduce themselves to a quest for the source of being. In each proof it is a question

---

[1] S.C.G. III, 2, 7.

[2] Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 147-148.

of linking up a particular aspect of being, the object of experience, to a first condition. Secondly, for Sertillanges, the work of the whole of theodicy is to integrate the proof of God. Consequently, it is not to be expected that St. Thomas fully developed each proof at the beginning of the Summa theologica. This theory of the nature of theodicy is relevant not only to Sertillanges' interpretation of the five ways but also, as will be shown in Chapter III, to his doctrine of man's knowledge of the nature of God. Finally, Sertillanges defends each of the five proofs as valid and adequate; however, he shows preference for the proof from the existence of corruptible beings, which he calls the central argument.

CHAPTER II

SUPPLEMENTARY PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Concern with the issues troubling contemporary man is a marked characteristic of the thinking and writing of Sertillanges. It is his conviction that the true follower of St. Thomas will take it upon himself to express Thomistic truth in accordance with the needs and the knowledge of the day. Twice in his long career he judged it necessary to treat at length of the existence of God. In the early nineteen hundreds and again in the nineteen hundred thirties Sertillanges discerned currents of thought that were undermining the notion of the existence of God. To oppose these destructive trends Sertillanges completed Les sources de la croyance en Dieu in 1905 and his two volume treatise Dieu ou rien in 1933. In writing both of these works he adapted his approach to current needs, seeking for the most part persuasive arguments rather than strict metaphysical proofs. He wrote not only to prove God but to show that all things are related to him, and find their explanation only in him.[1] A study of these writings will reveal Sertillanges' position with respect to the supplementary arguments for the existence of God.

---

[1] A. D. Sertillanges, Les sources de la croyance en Dieu (Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1905), p. 6. Dieu ou rien (Paris: Flammarion, 1933), I, 6.

A. Approach to God--1905

Early in the twentieth century Sertillanges found the contemporary mind a prey to the forces of naturalism, positivism, and idealism. Naturalism holds that nature explains itself and man; there is no need to seek further. Maintaining that observation is the only source of knowledge, positivism rejects any effort to attain the transcendent. Although the general public was not interested in investigating the various complicated offshoots of idealism, Sertillanges found that many had been influenced by its ultimate conclusion, the negation of a personal God. His purpose in writing Les sources de la croyance en Dieu is to offset the ravages of these systems, which tend to remove God from all regions of activity and science.

Sertillanges proposes to show that everything in the world and in life depends on God to such an extent that without him there is only nothingness and night.[1] Unlike the usual apologetic approach to the existence of God, which is an exposition of the metaphysical and moral ways, he chooses to study nature, life and society, and to demonstrate that each leads back to God. Using a historical approach and stressing universal reason, he intermingles arguments and proofs in an exhaustive study of the existence of God.

1. Universal consent

Sertillanges first examines the fact of universal consent. History reveals there has always been religion and in no epoch is there

---

[1]Sertillanges, Les sources ... , p. 6.

evidence of the absence of the idea of a sovereign divinity. It is Sertillanges' contention that, just as men have always believed in God, so too, philosophers have always believed that the universality of the affirmation concerning the existence of God is one of the most solid proofs.[1] The value of this idea of God is not founded on its age nor on the number of believers but on the fact that it stems from the nature of man. In brief, if the idea of God is a necessity of the human soul it is because there is a God. No philosopher expresses the principle of this argument better than St. Thomas Aquinas.

> That which is asserted universally, by everyone, cannot possibly be totally false. For a false opinion is a kind of infirmity of the understanding. . . . But defects, being outside the intention of nature, are accidental. And nothing accidental can be always and in all things.[2]

Sertillanges looks upon the argument from universal consent as a solidly probable argument. He hopes to render it more cogent by revealing the foundations on which it rests.[3]

2. Sources of universal consent

a. The world

Sertillanges sees the necessity of explaining the world as the first reason leading men to believe in God. Studying this motive from a historical perspective, he examines the thinking of primitive man, of the early Greek philosophers, and of the seventeenth and twentieth century thinkers. A consideration of early religions reveals a lasting universal persuasion, obscured by superstition, that there exists a super-

---

[1] Ibid., p. 18. [2] S.C.G. II, 34.

[3] Sertillanges, Les sources ... , pp. 17-31.

ior causality that explains and fills the world with its activity. In all probability the idea of a universe and of the necessity of a universal cause to explain it was beyond the reflection of the first men. Yet there is evidence that, in spite of numerous divinities, they instinctively sought a first cause that would be to the whole what each particular deity was to a particular phenomenon. Before this fact falls the objection that the gods preceded science as the explanation of this world but now science can explain everything. True, these early men explained the forces of nature by various deities, but in addition to these they looked to a supreme divinity, a first cause.[1]

The early Greek philosophers made the step from an instinctive tendency toward a first cause to a reasoned knowledge of it. Anaxagoras was the "sober man" who posited a Mind directing all in all. It was Aristotle who finally analyzed the activities of nature, and proved that the source of all movement was an unmoved mover. Thus, philosophy became the interpreter of that obscure universal notion of a sovereign divinity telling humanity that which it vaguely thought but was unable to express.[2]

After briefly indicating that modern negations of God rise from an exaggeration of the role of science, Sertillanges devotes his considerations to contemporary attempts to evade a first cause. The proof of God, cause of the world, is stated in simple terms. The world exists; there must be an explanation of its existence. The world moves; there must be a source of the activity so manifested. Efforts to evade the conclusion of this proof can be reduced to three. Some explain the

---

[1]Sertillanges, Les sources ... , pp. 33-40.

[2]Ibid., pp. 49-51.

existence of the world by homogeneous nebula in rotation; others by the eternity of the world; still others declare it inexplicable because man cannot go beyond sense knowledge. But human intelligence demands a cause. It seeks eternal truth and will not be satisfied with "the world exists and that is enough"; or "the world has a necessary existence."[1]

b. Order

A second reason leading men to believe in God is the necessity of explaining order in the universe. Sertillanges declares this approach to be the most accessible and the most striking.[2] After giving the historical background of the question, he describes the principal errors: replacing the cause of order by scientific explanations and the narrow anti-scientific efforts of a great number of apologists in their defense of God.

In answering the question "Is nature a work of intelligence?" the first step should be a consideration, not of the order and beauty of the world, but of the fundamental properties of nature. Stability, determinism, and intention are properties of nature that show it to be the work of an intelligence. Stability is a property by which the same causes produce the same effects; the same essences and natures, the same manifestations. If the causes, essences and natures did not act in the same way, there would be no certitude and no possibility of science. Determination in an agent supposes the intention to produce a certain effect. This intention does not come from the agent itself; if it did

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 55-74 [2] Ibid., p. 79.

the agent could modify the intention or at least know it. In the face of an intention manifesting itself permanently and infallibly the conclusion necessarily follows that there is a first intelligence directing each being to its end. The least action carefully analyzed leads to God. Considering the whole of nature and its admirable organization increases the rigor of the proof and furnishes greater light.[1]

The very arguments used to attack the proof only serve to emphasize the profound order of nature. Chance is not the answer for the evident organization of nature; it is the precise opposite of stability and order. Nor is it true to say that human reason reads into nature means and ends, intention and execution, thus confusing the order of knowledge and of reality. Those who use this objection forget that man is one of the works of nature; by admitting ends in man they ought to admit finality in all nature or contradict themselves. Disorder is also used to disprove the argument of intrinsic finality. Actually the question is whether order exists, not whether this is the best possible world. Furthermore, by admitting some kind of disorder one necessarily implies that there is order. Finally necessity is used to explain away God, and in modern times this necessity takes on the form of evolution. To assert that the organization of the world came about by evolution is to explain a process, not its cause. To argue that evolution follows its own laws and does so necessarily, only leads to the question, "Who laid down the laws?"[2]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 95-101.

[2] Ibid., pp. 102-125.

c. Human origins

Just as the necessity of explaining the universe is a motive for believing in God, so too, according to Sertillanges, is the necessity of explaining man. "The problem of the universe can appear to be in the strict sense the concern of the philosopher; the problem of man is a necessity of life."[1] Man seeks his origin, his law, his end.

Sertillanges begins his study of God and human origins by showing that the mass of primitive humanity had recourse to the idea of divine intervention to explain the appearance of man. Then he examines three modern explanations of the origin of man that would dispense with having recourse to God. The eternal generation theory of Aristotle has been revived. Rather than admit creation and its cause, a creator, some philosophers choose to bypass causality and ignore the latest findings of science concerning the age of the earth and the possibility of human habitation. Others maintain that when the proper conditions were present human life came into being. They have failed to distinguish between material conditions and a first cause. Atheistic evolutionists, in order to explain the formation of life, resort to spontaneous generation or transformism. Sertillanges makes a two-fold attack on their efforts. Neither of these theories has been proved. In addition, even if the whole process of evolution were demonstrated, natural sciences would have reached their objective, but philosophy would still have to treat of the ultimate explanation of nature.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 134.
"Le problème de l'univers peut paraître à la rigueur une occupation de philosophe: le problème de l'homme est une nécessité de vie."

[2] Ibid., pp. 152-159.

Man presents a singular problem to the atheist, who pretends to solve this problem by emphasizing all that man and the brute have in common. The atheist answers the challenge of human intelligence by holding either that beasts are endowed with intelligence or that man's intelligence, a result of evolution, is just a superior function of the organism. Sertillanges answers that through thought man attains the immaterial; therefore, there is in man a principle superior to the activities of matter. This faculty does not fall within the realm of science whose proper domain is sensible phenomena. While the scientist can study the material conditions of thought, he is completely outside his field in considering the nature of thought in itself. Through observation and experimentation the scientist can validly conclude that there will be no thought in man without a brain or with a certain kind of brain there will be a certain quality of thought. The scientist is not justified in declaring that the brain is the cause of thought.[1]

Probably the materialist's greatest error is in considering man as object, never as subject. If he would but study himself as subject he would realize that as a thinking being there is in himself something distinct from his matter; and if the intellectual soul is of an immaterial order, then its origin must be different from that of the body.[2] Further search will reveal again the first cause.

Finally, in trying to equate man and beast, the atheist must say either that the beast has an immaterial soul and, therefore, a creator has intervened; or that both man and beast have material souls and that thought is the result of highly organized matter. Some significant

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 164-171. [2] Ibid., pp. 171-174.

point are ignored in trying to prove the intelligence of the brute. That which is the result of the instinct of conservation is mistakenly advanced as proof of intelligence. Moreover, a thinking being will manifest evidence of judgment, knowledge, language, and progress. In no animal except man can one sincerely claim to find these testimonies of intelligence. Man proves the existence of God in a special way because of his immaterial soul.[1]

d. Need of protection

After considering the origin of human life as a source of belief in God, Sertillanges examines the law of human life. The formula of man's life is multiple. Both body and soul follow laws of development and a study of body, will, and intelligence, reveals that their needs are met only through the intervention of the absolute. The first aspect considered is related to the material conditions of human life. Sertillanges studies the need for protection to discover therein a source of belief in God. He contends that the feeling of the weakness of men in the face of nature is one of the sources of religious sentiment. This feeling of a need of protection and subsequent recourse to divinity were particularly strong in primitive man but even now the incertitude of life makes men turn to the divine. Sertillanges finds a value in this constant and universal fact that man's need of protection facilitates belief in God. He admits that there is no question of a scientific demonstration involved. Rather he suggests that in the moral order there are probablilities that are equivalent to certitude.[2] A second value he

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 175-186. [2] Ibid., p. 192.

finds in this feeling of dependence and appeal to transcendent protection, is that it makes man consider with better dispositions the other proofs in order to find the source of the happenings that condition his life.[1]

e. Truth

Passing from the realm of the possible to what he considers to be that of certitude, Sertillanges examines the idea of God and truth. He seeks to show that to admit the existence of truth is to admit God. Sertillanges first indicates the value of Platonic thought concerning truth and then goes on to show that the materialistic and idealistic theories of his day are not able to meet adequately the challenge of truth. He credits Plato with having understood and expressed magnificently that man's world of thought puts him in contact, not only with tangible realities that engender these thoughts, but also with superior invisible realities.[2] Man's world of thought is like a bridge that gives him access to another world, source of truth and source of all things. Sertillanges summarizes Plato's thought in the following lines:

> Our mind can only rest in the eternal and the necessary: therefore, the eternal and the necessary exist. There is no knowledge of fact as such; there is only knowledge of the idea represented by the fact: therefore, ideas exist. That which is subject to time cannot as such be the object of knowledge; its object should be properly speaking an <u>absolute</u>, that which is realized in the world expresses it; sensible things incarnate its truth; we testify to it and receive into ourselves the imperfect image of it; but neither objects nor we are the source of

---

[1] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 200

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 203-204.

> it. Where then does it reside? In the invisible, says Plato, and it is God who is the ultimate reason and the bond.[1]

Sertillanges attacks materialism on three major issues. He asks first of all, how brute matter and blind forces can combine to bring into being minds capable of truth and certitude. Secondly, he indicates that though the materialist may call truth relative, a manner of adapting self to things, by this very statement the latter involves himself in the contradiction of expressing a truth that he does not consider relative. Finally, Sertillanges asserts that just as brute force cannot guarantee the value of man's mind neither can it guarantee the value of truth. Truth is the adequation of mind and thing. The facts observed must represent an idea, an order, a plan--the exact notion of which would constitute truth. Sertillanges sees in this consideration a further extension of finality in the world. Without finality the world could not be constituted; without finality it could not be thought.

> Without a directing idea absolutely nothing is possible; without a model idea nothing is intelligible. This is the same proof from two different points of view: the first is directed to being

---

[1] Ibid., p. 206.

"Notre esprit ne peut se poser que sur l'éternel et le nécessaire: donc l'éternel et le nécessaire existent. Il n'y a pas de science du fait en tant que tel; il n'y a de science que de l'idée représentée par le fait: donc les idées existent. Ce qui est soumis au temps ne saurait, en tant que tel, être objet de science; l'objet de celle-ci doit être à proprement parler un absolu; ce qui se réalise dans le monde l'exprime; les choses sensibles incarnent sa vérité; nous nous la constatons et en recevons en nous l'image imparfaite; mais ni les objets ni nous n'en sommes la source. Ou donc réside-t-elle? Dans l'invisible, dit Platon, et c'est Dieu qui en est la raison dernière et le lien."

inasmuch as it subsists in itself; the second is directed toward being inasmuch as it is reflected in us.[1]

Disregarding scientific idealism as having little direct bearing on the question of God, Sertillanges prefers rather to weigh the consequences of various forms of pantheistic idealism. For some the ideal subsists in an eternal, sovereign, creating definition or law. Since a law is a being of reason, this theory cannot establish the reality of the ideal.[2] Sertillanges makes particular mention of Taine, declaring that his Eternal Axiom hangs in mid-air. Others claim the ideal is realized in man and yet they affirm that it has an objective value. There is a contradiction in this position. Either the ideal is independent of man and thus real without him or it is not real without man and thus not independent. A choice must be made here between a hypothesis that points to God or one that leads to the absurdity of making a creation of man the norm of all truth.[3]

f. Morality

After having reached God by way of the laws of thought, Sertillanges examines the laws of the will in order to arrive at the same goal. He contends that the authority of conscience, the exigencies of duty, and a complete analysis of the idea of good have their foundation in God.[4]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 212.
"Sans idée directrice, rien absolument n'est possible; sans idée type, rien absolument n'est intelligible. C'est la même preuve à deux points de vue differents: le premier s'adresse à l'être en tant qu'il subsiste en lui-même; le second s'addresse a l'être en tant qu'il se reflète en nous."

[2] Ibid., pp. 227-228.

[3] Ibid., pp. 230-232.

[4] Ibid., p. 243.

Those who deny the relationship of morality and God contradict the whole of human tradition. In early society, morality and cult are one and the same thing. The most ancient documents are the loftiest and the most explicit concerning religion and the good. The decadence that came later probably explains the small place given to God in the morality of the philosophers. Nevertheless, Socrates declares that the true and the good have one source, God. Plato sees the needs of the gods as a foundation for laws, and Aristotle declares that man can be truly man only if he is divine. The weaknesses and deviations of ancient systems of morality stem from inability to establish a true notion of divinity and of its relations with man. However, living tradition is almost unanimous in considering divinity as the basis of the idea of good and in grounding man's obligation of realizing the good in divinity.[1]

In seeking the foundation of morality Sertillanges first shows the inadequacies of the moral theories of positivism, of utilitarianism and of Kantianism. Positive morality traces the origin of the concept of duty, not to reason, but to a gradual growth of general beliefs arising from experience and the orders of authority. Thus, there is no morality but just a natural growth of custom. But, asks Sertillanges, if all morality is dupery why are positivists intent upon establishing morality and why do they believe in good and posit an ideal with a hierarchy of values?[2] The utilitarian effort to base morality on personal and social interest is doomed to failure, says Sertillanges, because of the overriding power of egotism and the absence of an objective norm.[3]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 243-245. [2] Ibid., pp. 257-258.

[3] Ibid., pp. 272-273.

Finally, Sertillanges finds that many of his contemporaries will agree that the good is the order that reason establishes in human action in conformity with human nature and the place it occupies in creation. They will agree that the good is an absolute, that man may refuse to choose it but he cannot deny its existence. However, together with Kant, they will go no further. Human reason is sovereign; man sees his duty and imposes it upon himself. To ask why human will imposes a law upon itself is a vain question.[1]

Sertillanges then suggests his own approach to the problem. In order that a moral doctrine be rational and complete, man must know what is demanded of him and why. The object of morality is to safeguard the nature of man and all his relations with the milieu in which he is. Morality is the truth of conduct founded on the order of things.[2] Having previously established that without God there can be neither order, nor nature, nor truth related to order or nature, Sertillanges is thus justified in concluding that without God there can be no morality. Truth consists in the conceptions of the creating Intelligence. From this Intelligence are derived the natures composing the world, the relations bringing them together, and the laws ruling them. God is the source of truth; He is also the source of good, which is only truth in the practical order. Since the origin of good is in God, it follows that the origin of the obligation that imposes the good is likewise in God. If the good obliges, it is because the good has a value that obliges.

Pursuing the discussion of God and morality, Sertillanges suggests

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 279-282. [2] Ibid., p. 288.

[3] Ibid.

that once the idea of God and obligation is admitted, the idea of sanction can be used as a way of approaching God. Sanction is the indispensable counterpart of the idea of obligation.[1] The idea of sanction is based on the thought that every act implies a consequence for the being that posits it. Sertillanges shows that neither natural sanctions, nor social sanction, nor the sanctions of conscience are sufficient to reward and to punish. These sanctions are subject to accident, they do not address themselves to morality as such, and they cannot proportion their interventions to the degree of vice or virtue involved.[2] An adequate sanction that communicates to the other sanctions a partial or total efficacy and a moral character must be divine. It must come from a cause that is all-powerful, transcendent, intelligent, wise, and holy. Moreover this sanction must originate in a cause that has power over all agents, transcends all things, penetrates all intentions, and exercises justice with sovereign wisdom and equity. This cause can only be God. A study of morality serves to establish that both its foundation and its summit are to be found in God.[3]

g. Human aspirations

In a series of five chapters Sertillanges studies the idea of God and human aspirations. The desire to live, interior uneasiness, the unlimited aspirations of the will, and the reality of the ideal are successively examined at length.

Human destiny, in the eyes of Sertillanges, has two aspects: the

---

[1] Ibid., p. 295.

[2] Ibid., pp. 312-322.

[3] Ibid., p. 324.

existence that is given together with the duration that measures it and that which fills this existence and serves as its object.[1] In order to arrive at the truth concerning these aspects, it is necessary that man's profound desires be probed and understood. Desires are means used by nature to make man reach his end. To study man's desires is to arrive at knowledge of his end--his natural destiny.[2]

The most fundamental desire of man is the desire to live. Sertillanges seeks to demonstrate that this bent does not tend toward the grave but toward infinity. All men at all times have noted the brevity of life. The sense of life's brevity is a constant, universal phenomenon flowing from the very nature of the soul.[3] Man's discontent really arises not from the fact that life is short, but from the knowledge that it comes to an end. So strong is man's belief in life that through the ages he has looked to religion or philosophy to remove death as a final end.

Next Sertillanges seeks the source of this desire for unending life, weighs the possibility of a desire incapable of fulfillment, and studies the object of man's desire and its relation to divinity. This desire of life is not found in the brute, since the brute does not know life as such but merely a succession of objects. Man, however, by reason of his rational nature, can conceive of the true, the good. He can know life as a good and desire it as such. This desire is a phenomenon of nature since it is found everywhere, in all ages, among all people.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 327.

[2] Ibid., p. 328.

[3] Ibid., pp. 329-330.

Such a natural desire should have a natural object. Sertillanges contends that a desire of nature cannot be in vain. Just as there would be no animal were there no food to sustain it, so there would be no natural desire of immortality were there no means to satisfy the desire. Sertillanges maintains that this desire contains its object in a certain way and that through this object can be found the cause and the end of the desire.[1] A desire for indefectible life presupposes at the basis of man's spiritual being an indefectible source, and the cause of this indefectible source must be eternal, transcendent--God. Likewise the object of a desire for indefectible life must itself be eternal; it must possess indefectibility through itself. To be indefectible through self is to be the source of being--God. The first cause revealing itself as final cause as well as creating cause is reached through vital desire.[2]

Approaching the subject of human destiny from the point of view of the positive realities that should fill it, rather than from its duration, Sertillanges first considers the feeling of uneasiness engendered by all that is offered in this life. He reduces his considerations to three: exterior constraint imposed upon man by his surroundings, interior contradiction that makes man oppose himself, and the insufficiency of all that appears able to satisfy the real exigencies of desire. Considered in itself, this condition of man is incomprehensible for it is entirely against his nature. He is faced with anguish, moral disorder, and discontent, yet his one desire is fulfillment. A further study of those objects that seem to satisfy man for a time indicates that

---

[1] Ibid., p. 343.

[2] Ibid., pp. 339-345.

he seeks something else that is in some way related to that which pleases him temporarily. An analysis of the ultimates that man seeks in this life--knowledge, power, riches, literature, love, society, progress, religion, evil--shows that his desires carry him far beyond these goals to the infinite. Man rejects all limits either in duration or value; he seeks the ideal.[1]

In the fifth chapter of his treatise on God and human aspirations, Sertillanges seeks to show that the ideal that man pursues is real. That which pleases man in all things is not what is really there but what man would like to find there: plenitude and indefectibility. The will follows the intellect; and because thought has for domain all being, desire has for domain all good. Sertillanges expresses the law of the will in this way.

> To the will in general corresponds good in general;
> To the will in one of its desires corresponds nature in one of its objects;
> To the will taken as a global power and characterized by a capacity, by an infinite virtuality, corresponds an object that realizes the infinite.[2]

The ideal of which Sertillanges writes is this infinite taken as expressing all that can fulfill man's desire in every area and without any limit.[3]

The appetite for the ideal is a phenomenon of nature found everywhere and in every man. Resulting from the intellectual make-up of man,

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 348-389.

[2] Ibid., p. 418.
"A la volonté en général correspond le bien en général;
A la volonté dans un de ses désirs correspond la nature dans un de ses objets;
A la volonté prise comme puissance globale et caractérisée par une capacité, par une virtualité infinie, correspond un objet qui réalise l'infini.

[3] Ibid.

it is a primitive phenomenon preceding every personal desire. Sertillanges avers that, just as there is in nature a means to satisfy the hunger of the body, so too there must be an object to satisfy the hunger of the soul.[1] If this is not so, then man exists in order to tend toward nothingness. Man and his desires are meaningless unless there is a divine goal. Without this goal the desires of man are incomprehensible, since only the divine can satisfy the desires of man. If this ideal is not real, man's will wills nothing although it wills, and man himself is nothingness. The answer to these contradictions is to affirm that the necessary is, the absolute is.[2]

h. Social life

The final order that Sertillanges chooses to treat is the social order. At first glance this consideration might seem superfluous, since social life is merely an aspect of human life. It can readily be affirmed that God is necessary for social life by the very fact that he is necessary for human life. Nevertheless, Sertillanges undertakes a lengthy examination of social life as a way to God because it is his belief that particular considerations more effectively engender convictions.[3] Social life presents a specific order of facts opening into wider considerations related to the idea of God. In addition Sertillanges finds this approach especially appropriate because of an increasing preoccupation with the social science.[4]

Sertillanges first examines the primary social unit, the family. Rather than consider family duties and trace them back to God, their principle, end, and sanction; or family love and find its source and end

---

[1] Ibid., p. 424.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., p. 436.
[4] Ibid., pp. 435-441.

in God, Sertillanges prefers to examine in more detail the very nature of the family and the reciprocal duties of its members. The family is constituted by marriage, and men have always seen in marriage more than a personal contract. They have seen marriage as a natural institution, as a social institution, and as a religious institution. Both as a natural institution and as a religious one, marriage is founded upon the idea of God. Sertillanges plans to show eventually that society and its laws spring from God, but here he concludes that humanity has always associated marriage with the influence of the divine. The unity and perpetuity underlying the nature of marriage frequently make such demands upon the individual that without God these efforts find little justification. Another aspect of family life that finds its guarantee in the divine is its hierarchical structure. The relations of husband and wife find their ultimate meaning in God. If both spouses are faithful there is little difficulty, but where there is a lack of obedience, justice, or affectionate protection the ultimate recourse for the suffering partner can only be God.[1] Likewise Sertillanges examines the relations existing between parents and children and finds that to prove that life is good, that children are subject to their parents, and that both have rights and duties, the existence of God must be admitted. The love, honor, and obedience demanded of children find their ultimate justification in God. Sertillanges adds that an analysis of parental obligations similar to that made of filial duties would result in the conclusion already drawn.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 462.

[2] Ibid., p. 474.

In studying nature and the human individual Sertillanges indicates evidence of finality and concludes to an intelligent first cause. Choosing a different approach in his consideration of the family, Sertillanges seeks to prove God as the guarantee of the functioning of the family. One reason why he treats the question of the family and God in this way is that divine intervention seems less evident in the constitution of the family.[1] However, a consideration of the grouping of families and their functioning as a society suggests again the idea of God as a final cause. Society is generally accepted as a natural phenomenon, not as a product of human wills. Also social development is seen as ruled by laws similar to those of nature and following a plan of evolution with a definite orientation. It might seem that society has as cause human reason functioning freely and even arbitrarily. But man is a social being by nature; his reason puts itself at the service of instinct, and the difference between his society and that of other animals is that man's society is capable of progress. Nevertheless, the foundation of his society is nature, of which human liberty is only an instrument. Man together with his liberty is a product of the universe. The causes that have given man being are the authors of society by the very fact that man is the author of it. Even more so are they causes in the measure that man's intervention is not present. There is intelligence in social functioning and not all of it derives from man, since he himself is dominated by laws some of which he knows only partially. The intelligence, beauty, and wealth of organization of society are beyond

---

[1] Ibid.

the capacity of man. As in the case of order in nature and finality in man the answer is to be found in an intelligent cause that directs social evolution and rules both the actions of nature and the free will of man.[1]

The greater part of Sertillanges' treatment of the social bond is related to the origin of power. He discusses the three possible sources of power: nature in evolution, God, and social contract. Considering social contract first, Sertillanges shows that this theory is no longer accepted both because the social sciences recognize that human society is a natural phenomenon, not an arbitrary convention, and because the instability resulting from such arbitrary power contradicts nature itself.[2] Then Sertillanges examines the evolutionary theory that authority and submission to it are hereditary facts effected by natural selectivity. He maintains that such a theory of right and duty leads to anarchy, since the only virtue is to conquer and the only social crime to be conquered.[3]

Sertillanges summarizes his argument for founding the social bond in this way.

> That which commands is the law.
> The law is reason or nothing,
> Reason is God or nothing;
> Thus that which commands is ultimately God.[4]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 477-492.

[2] Ibid., pp. 512-513.

[3] Ibid., p. 515.

[4] Ibid., pp. 520-521.
"Ce qui commande, c'est la loi.
La loi, c'est la raison, ou rien,
La raison, c'est Dieu, ou rien;
Donc, ce qui commande, au fond, c'est Dieu."

The alternatives to law commanding are force, chance, or anarchy. Of these, only law can guarantee proper social functioning. The second premise, that law is reason, all philosophers admit. Sertillanges has already shown that reason is God, but briefly he argues here that reason can prove itself only by appealing to the divine and by considering itself divine. After justifying each of the premises, Sertillanges draws the following conclusions. Authority can prove its right only by appealing to the laws of reason, which are founded on the nature of things. Law rules only in virtue of a mandate of nature. Since reason is God and nature is God, then authority finds its justification only by invoking divine investiture.[1]

Sertillanges identifies social finality and human progress and argues that the idea of God is essential to progress. He offers three reasons to justify seeking progress, all of them founded on God. The idea of God offers a motive for promoting the good, since God's creating will seeks man's cooperation to complete his work. God is also a guarantee against dangers that might frustrate man's efforts. Finally, the idea of God offers the assurance that the end in view is worth the effort involved.[2]

Then Sertillanges proposes that it is impossible to promote progress without the idea of God. He first defines progress as a movement tending toward increasing the intelligent and moral being of man--an ascension from flesh to spirit, from matter to intelligence, from native brutality to the heroism of human duty.[3] Once this definition is accepted,

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 521-523.

[2] Ibid., p. 534.

[3] Ibid., 535.

it is evident that progress is above all a moral question. Sertillanges has already shown that morality without God is without efficacy or foundation. Man needs to perceive beyond the idea, a spirit; beyond the duty, a will that recommends or imposes. Sertillanges points to history and maintains that without God there is no nation. In keeping with his concern for contemporary issues, he shows that democratic society finds only in God the raison d'être of its principles of equality before the law and of universal suffrage. Requiring more civic virtues, democratic and republican regimes thus repose more on God, who is the foundation of all morality, the source of all virtue, and consequently, the ultimate social bond.[1]

3. Contemporary Objections

In a final chapter Sertillanges disposes of three positive arguments against the existence of God. The so-called scientific objection argues that there is no God because there is no need of God. Physical events have a physical explanation and voluntary acts come from the will. In answer, Sertillanges indicates that both physical and human activity must be accounted for both as to their existence and as to their power to act. The popular objection maintains that evil exists, therefore, God does not exist. Sertillanges gives two answers: one regarding evil in nature and evil as it affects man, the other regarding individual and collective evil. Evil is only an accident to the good; the fact of failure is evidence of purpose, order, and good. In addition, the evil that man suffers merely emphasizes man's insatiable appetite for the

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 535-543.

good. Man errs by making his life the measure of all things. He must transcend matter and time and realize that the complete answer to the problem of evil is not to be found in this present life.[1]

The greater part of this chapter is devoted to what Sertillanges calls the philosophical argument: God does not exist because his existence is impossible. Sertillanges proposes four current philosophical objections to God's existence:[2] (1) An infinite God would absorb all that exists: those who affirm his existence would not exist. (2) God is conceived as a person but a person is opposed to infinity. (3) God is absolute, thus, he cannot be a personal God having necessary relations with his works. (4) God is perfect and no imperfect work can emanate from him. These objections lead either to complete denial of God or to some form of idealistic pantheism wherein the universe is striving incessantly toward the perfect realization of the true, the good, and being itself.

Sertillanges contends that all these problems stem from either failure to recognize the total dependence of the creature on the creator or failure to recognize the special and transcendent nature of the relations of creator and creature.[3] God without the world is not less infinite. God has all being; he carries all in himself and possesses all.[4] To the objection that God cannot be personal because personality implies opposition and thus limitation, Sertillanges has a two-fold reply. Personality does not essentially involve opposition; it means an

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 546-550.

[2] Ibid., pp. 554-558.

[3] Ibid., p. 557.

[4] Ibid., pp. 556-557.

independent self-conscious being. Moreover, there is enough opposition for God to be called a person: God is not the world but the source from which the world emanates.[1] With regard to God the absolute, the relations that we posit due to our poverty of language mean relations from creatures to God and not from God to creatures, thus leaving him fullness of being, independence, and perfection. Finally it is metaphysically impossible to exclude imperfection from the work of God the perfect, since to do so he would have to impart his own nature.[2] The infinite cannot create another infinite.

One of Sertillanges' closing paragraphs sounds the keynote of his reflections on God's existence and nature.

> Let us resign ouselves to not understanding the Ineffable; nevertheless, let us affirm that he is, because without him nothing can be and nothing can be understood.[3]

B. Approach to God--1933

In the early 1930's Sertillanges undertook the task of writing another book in defense of God, Dieu ou rien. This time his attention is directed toward those opponents whose attacks are characterized by negation. Sertillanges wishes to show the contradiction into which they fall by replacing God with values that find their being only in him.

The structure of Dieu ou rien is similar to that of the earlier work, Les sources de la croyance en Dieu. As in the first work, consider-

---

[1] Ibid., p. 557.

[2] Ibid., p. 559.

[3] Ibid., p. 560

"Prenons notre parti de ne pas comprendre l'Ineffable; mais affirmons pourtant qu'il est, parce que sans lui rien ne peut être et rien ne peut se comprendre."

ation is given to the world, to human origins, truth, morality, human aspirations, and the social order. However, aside from the fact that the historical approach is not employed in Dieu ou rien, there are two notable differences. Extensive treatment is accorded metaphysical proofs although Sertillanges explicitly affirms the primacy of the moral approach to God.[1] In addition a new dimension of social life is treated and an entire chapter is devoted to the question of atheism.

1. Metaphysical Arguments

a. The world

In the whole of the first chapter, entitled "God and the World," Sertillanges makes use of a metaphysical approach, discussing the first being, the first mover, and the principle of order. In considering the first being, Sertillanges develops the ideas of St. Thomas' third way and shows that the first necessary being must be the foundation of all that is necessary and the foundation of the existence of all that is contingent.[2] From the fact of becoming, Sertillanges proceeds to the first mover; but as in his treatment of the first being, he refrains from leading his reader through abstruse reasoning to the conclusion that the first mover, the God of conscience, and the God of the heart are one.[3] Then follows a lengthy development of the principle of order. The main points that Sertillanges wishes to make are four. In any legitimate interpretation of nature and its work intelligence manifests itself through the evidence of finality. The determinism of nature is made up of regular

---

[1] Sertillanges, Dieu ou rien ... , I, 193.

[2] Ibid., I, 12-13.

[3] Ibid., I, 19-20.

sequences revealing an order among things in addition to an order in things. These sequences, these particular determinations result in beings.[1] Finally, there is a progressive ascension of being, more and more oriented toward intelligence and the progress of intelligence until finality is not only conscious of what it realizes but proposes it.[2]

b. Human origins

Three topics constitute the focal point of Sertillanges' study of God and human origins: the place of man in life; man, witness of spirit in nature; and man witness of pure Spirit. In Sertillanges' view, the influence of man covers all the time of life and even the ages that prepared for life. "Man is the way, the truth and the life of the biosphere."[3] Man is spirit and furnishes nature with a mirror disclosing an immanent thought in the whole of nature without which human thought would not be.[4] Thought is the product of intellect. Thus, man is substantially spirit and must find his origin in the Spirit that is the universal Source.

c. Truth

Having established the existence of a thought that is immanent to all things and leads to the first Thought and having shown that thought and the idea of God are inseparable, Sertillanges proceeds to an examination of truth. It is through truth that science, art, and love have meaning. Science is founded on the intelligibility of the world.

---

[1] Ibid., I, 75.

[2] Ibid., I, 74-75.

[3] Ibid., I, 105.

[4] Ibid.

Things can be classified, laws deduced, and these truths are independent of the things themselves and of the mind that discovers them. Art is a second form of the life of truth in reality. Art is in the mind as ideal and passes into reality through works. "The artist will think of the world no longer in abstract terms, as the scholar does; but in symbols, in images representing true relationships, analogies, symmetries, rhythms, effects of the fraternity of things."[1] Love, too, has close relationship with the ideal, seeking the beautiful but going beyond to what is eternal and immutable.[2]

It is Sertillanges' conviction that since truth plays such a large part in our conscious life it is important to use truth as a way to God and to expose the philosophies that would destroy it. He then proceeds to show that the materialistic theory of knowledge errs by making the rational spring from the irrational without explaining a transformation that is considered to be an authentic adaptation having an absolute objective value. The materialist denies to reality all immanent spirituality and all finality and then describes a biological adaptation that presupposes a rational order. Materialism also commits the logical error of constructing a system of truth that destroys the truth that it is proposing. According to the materialistic hypothesis, thought cannot have an absolute value of truth, and yet the materialist operates on the truth of his thought.

---

[1] Ibid., I, 153.
"L'artiste pensera le monde non plus en formules abstraites, comme le savant, mais en symboles, en images figurant des rapports vrais, des analogies, des symétries, des rythmes, effets de la fraternité de choses.

[2] Ibid., I, 151-154.

The idealistic errors that Sertillanges discusses are two. One consists in identifying the divine with a logical entity; the other in establishing the divine, not in itself, but inasmuch as it is realized in nature, in the developing universe, in man. In refuting idealism Sertillanges sums up the approach through truth.

> The ideal must be real in order to play its role of ideal with regard to a universe that is real and ideal at the same time, with regard to a mind having the same characteristics, and in addition reflecting the universe. It is necessary that in the first principle these two attributes, ideality and reality, reunite and fix their synthesis. It is through reality that the Absolute will be an ideal; it is through ideality that it must be real. The real Ideal, the ideal Reality must be at the summit of all, and this is God.[1]

2. Moral Arguments

a. Morality

Finally, after considering God and the world, God and human origins, and God and thought, Sertillanges turns from metaphysics to morality. He suggests that the moral proofs are nearer the real sources of conviction, bringing up problems whose principles all admit unless they evade them.[2] In his examination of the question of God and morality, Sertillanges discusses the good, obligation, and sanction and shows that each of these finds its meaning in the idea of God. Sertillanges relates

---

[1] Ibid., I, 189.
"Il faut que l'idéal soit réel, pour jouer son rôle d'idéal à l'égard d'un univers à la fois idéal et réel, à l'égard d'un esprit ayant les mêmes caractères et reflétant au surplus l'univers. Il faut qu'en l'unique Principe premier, ces deux attribus: idéalité, réalité se rejoignent et établissent leur synthèse. C'est à force de réalité que l'Absolu sera un idéal; c'est à force d'idéalité qu'il doit être réel. L'Idéal réel, la Réalité idéale doit être au sommet de tout, et c'est Dieu."

[2] Ibid., I, 193.

this approach to that of order. It is the same finality that rules nature and man and that "invites us from within to follow our own law, an element of the universal law."[1] Discerning in the evolution of nature an ascent to morality, Sertillanges goes further and declares that the order of the world is ultimately moral. He concludes that God the Good makes Himself known by the moral nature and the initial drive that he gives man, and by the attraction he exercises.[2]

In approaching God through a consideration of human desire, Sertillanges studies both the desire for immortality and the desire for happiness. The desire for immortality is a fact of human nature with a two-fold implication. This desire must have a cause and an end. A natural tendency toward indefectibility cannot rise from a defectible source. Both the substance that desires and the desire itself demand a source that transcends all defectibility--God. Secondly, the only object that can satisfy a being with a desire for indefectible life is one that possesses eternal life, one that possesses indefectibility in himself--God. Sertillanges sums up his reasoning in these words.

> Our relations with a changing world, which is a world of death, do not suffice. In God eternal, place of spirits, the stabilization of our tendencies is made possible. The affirmation of God in our conscience is a negation of death. On the contrary, the negation of God is an affirmation of the inalienable fatal right of nothingness over us, and that in full contradiction

---

[1] Ibid., I, 229.

[2] Ibid., I, 230.

> with this will for life, with this ineradicable belief in life that is our very being.[1]

Man's appetite for happiness is another indication of God. There is in man a natural drive toward happiness that remains unsatisfied because it is unlimited. This good toward which man naturally tends is not his own creation. This conception is a fact of nature; it is nature that conceives and through man tends toward the good and draws man toward it.[2] This tendency toward the ideal is in the very being of man.[3]

> There is in each of us, according to Schopenhauer, a spirit of the species that makes us desire what is fitting for this species. There is in us also, and it is the same one, a spirit of the divine, a spirit of Being, which seeks the total good, and this spirit is the action of God in us; it is the action that creates us and that, in creating us, launches us with an irresistible drive toward the ideal of good that is its proper object and its eternal nourishment.[4]

---

[1] Ibid., II, 26-27.

"Nos rapports avec le monde du changement, qui est un monde de mort, ne nous suffisent pas. En Dieu éternel, lieu des esprits, la stabilisation de nos tendances est rendue possible. L'affirmation de Dieu en notre conscience est une négation de la mort. Au rebours la négation de Dieu est une affirmation du droit imprescriptible et fatal du néant sur nous, cela en pleine contradiction avec cette volonté de vie, avec cette croyance indéracinable à la vie qui est notre être même."

[2] Ibid., II. 63.

[3] Ibid., II, 64.

[4] Ibid., I, 67.

"Il y a en chacun de nous, selon Schopenhauer, un génie de l'espèce qui nous fait désirer ce qui convient au bien de cette espèce Il y a en nous, aussi, et c'est le même, un génie du divin, un génie de l'Etre, qui cherche le bien total et ce génie, c'est l'action de Dieu en nous; c'est l'action qui nous crée et qui, en nous créant, nous lance d'un irrésistible appetit vers l'idéal du bien qui est son objet propre et son aliment éternel."

b. The social order

Just as the idea of God is bound up in the conception of the life of the individual, so too is this idea at the root of social life. The social fact, the social bond, and social finality are three aspects of social life each of which points to the existence of God. Sertillanges sees society as a natural fact developing according to laws similar to those of nature and revealing an evolution that depends, not on the initiative of individuals, but on higher, more general influences.[1] There is a rationality in social functioning that is attributable to nature rather than to human intelligence. Society is an objective thing that demands a cause and an end. Like the fact of humanity and that of nature, the social fact points to God as its source.[2]

The social bond leads to God in two ways. The social virtues exist and without a foundation in the divine these virtues would fall before the onslaught of egotism. On the other hand, social authority has roots in laws of reason founded on the nature of things. "And since reason is God and since nature is also God, authority can only justify itself by invoking--whether implicitly or explicitly it matters little--divine investiture as its supreme guarantee."[3] Thus both social living and the authority inherent in social living have their foundation in God.

---

[1] Ibid., II, 71.

[2] Ibid., II, 69-77.

[3] Ibid., II, 98.
"Et puisque la raison c'est Dieu, et puisque la nature c'est Dieu encore, l'autorité ne peut se justifier elle-même qu'en invoquant--implicitement ou explicitement peu importe--l'investiture divine comme sa suprême guarantie."

It is generally admitted that the common good and progress are the ends of social activity. Man's social instincts and man's conquest of selfish egotism find their justification only in the divine. Once again the question centers on morality and again it must be concluded that only the recognition of God, the Sovereign Good, is stronger than man's instinctive egotism.

c. Civilization

Approaching the question of society on a broader scale, Sertillanges studies civilization to show that it too demands God by the fact of its existence, as a justification for its end, and as a guarantee of its functioning. Civilization is considered here as human development of a universal order.[1] It is a vast fact revealing cosmic laws, biological laws, psychological laws, social laws, moral laws and religious laws.[2] It is the geosphere attaining its highest point of functioning and demanding not a mere mechanical cause but a vital, spiritual, moral, civilizing one, the proper cause of this ultimate effect. Humanity seeks to grow; to deliver itself from disease; ignorance and constraint. If there is no transcendent reality, these efforts seem meaningless. Material progress has significance only as a means of interior progress toward a definite end, the sovereign good.[3] In addition to offering civilization its ends, the idea of God guarantees the achieving of these ends by supplying a sovereign rule and a supreme value.[4]

---

[1] Ibid., II, 126.

[2] Ibid., II, 142.

[3] Ibid., II, 129.

[4] Ibid., II, 159.

3. Atheism

In a final chapter Sertillanges takes up the question of atheism. He contends that so called atheists do not deny God, they merely displace him.[1] The sense of the absolute is so much a part of man that he can never rid himself of it. Although there seem to be more and more atheists, there are in effect fewer, since every current ideology is vested with the character of an absolute. In addition, the feeling of mystery is growing and with it the authority of great spiritual ideas allied with the notion of God: nature, life, truth, goodness, justice, fraternity, respect, harmony, progress, union of peoples and growth of true life.[2]

Here, in passing, Sertillanges refers to the argument from universal consent. Man has a religious sense, an instinctive sentiment of a mysterious reality upon which he feels that he and his surroundings depend. Natural explanations of this religious sentiment beg the question. Man did not become religious because nature, society, or life impressed him with mystery but because he had within himself the capacity for the divine, he gave a religious interpretation to natural phenomena.[3]

Sertillanges describes four kinds of atheists: the false, the dilettante, the forgetful, and the fearful. The false atheists are "pious seekers who do not come to a conclusion, who hesitate between 'God, a

---

[1] Ibid., II, 181.
"Effectivement, et en dépit de tout discours contraire, personne ne nie Dieu, on ne fait que le déplacer."

[2] Ibid., II, 183.

[3] Ibid., II, 188.

a foolish conception, or sublime mystery,' but who believe in a different way."[1] The dilettante is happy to be rid of myths but does not realize that his world is a meaningless one. The forgetful atheist is either one who loves life but forgets its principle, or one who denies God because impressed by the splendor of the world and forgetful of its fragility. The fearful atheist is afraid that yielding to truth will deprive him of his carefree life. Sertillanges concludes that "belief in God cannot be really avoided, it must be either declared or endured, it must always be lived."[2] Refusal to believe cuts man off from the truth of life, yet universal order constrains him to live by this truth.[3]

C. Conclusion

An investigation of Sertillanges' two major works concerned with a popular presentation of proofs for the existence of God, Les sources de la croyance en Dieu and Dieu ou rien, reveals diversity of approach to the question. In Les sources de la croyance en Dieu Sertillanges shows a preference for the proof from universal consent. While admitting that it is not a demonstrative proof, Sertillanges declares it to be solidly probable and seeks to strengthen it by showing why belief in God

---

[1] Ibid., II, 194.
"Il en est ainsi des chercheurs pieux qui n'arrivent pas à conclure, qui hésitent entre Dieu conception folle ou sublime mystère, mais qui croient autrement."

[2] Ibid., II, 206.
"La croyance en Dieu ne peut pas être réellement évitée; il faut la poser ou la subir; il faut toujours la vivre."

[3] Ibid., II, 207.

is natural to man. To attain his end, Sertillanges examines the world, man and society. In each of these areas he finds reasons why man has concluded to the existence of God. The world poses the problem of its origin and of its order. A consideration of man leads to questions concerning his origin, his need for protection, the nature of truth and morality, and human aspirations. The study of society brings to mind the nature of the family, the social fact, the social bond, and social finality.

Using a historical approach and stressing universal reason, Sertillanges examines various aspects of the world, man, and society to artue to the existence of God. In his consideration of morality and of the social bond he uses conclusions of previous arguments. In all other instancces, in keeping with his belief that particular considerations more effectively generate convictions, he develops separate arguments amplifying the way of efficient causality or the way of finality. While proposing to strengthen the argument from universal consent, Sertillanges has derived from St. Thomas' ways fourteen arguments for the existence of God.

Sertillanges' later work, Dieu ou rien shows some interesting differences. The approach is simple and more direct, although the topics treated are similar: the world, human origins, thought, morality, human desire, the social order and civilization. Unlike Les sources de la croyance en Dieu, in his treatment of the origin and order of the world in Dieu ou rien Sertillanges introduces a purely metaphysical approach that develops the idea of the first being, the first mover and the principal of order. Although he relates one argument to another, e.g., finality

in nature and finality in human conduct, Sertillanges avoids proving any argument by a previous one. Whereas in Les sources de la croyance en Dieu the general consensus of mankind is a central issue, in Dieu ou rien it is only briefly developed in a chapter on the atheist. In his later work Sertillanges makes an explicit statement concerning the primacy of the moral proofs, maintaining that for most men assent to the metaphysical proofs is preceded by moral and religious convictions. While admitting that men may choose to evade the moral proofs, Sertillanges finds these proofs to be nearer to the real sources of convictions. He believes that this is true because the moral proofs are concerned with problems whose principles are known to everyone.

In Les sources de la croyance en Dieu Sertillanges hints at the ideal of a real unity of mankind; twenty-eight years later he develops the idea of civilization, its existence, its guarantee, and its final end into an argument for the existence of God. Another consideration that Sertillanges introduces into his later work is that of the atheist. His position is that no man effectively denies the absolute.

In both Les sources de la croyance en Dieu and Dieu ou rien Sertillanges offers an extensive study of man's ways to God. Since his approach in these volumes is not purely metaphysical it loses authority in the eyes of the philosopher. It is excellent for the seeker who is not used to abstruse reasoning but wants a simple but comprehensive study of the question of God's existence.

CHAPTER III

MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ACCORDING TO SERTILLANGES

God the unknowable is a constantly recurring theme in the philosophical writings of Père Sertillanges. As early as 1893 in a study of the unknowable of Fouillée,[1] he reveals the general direction of his thinking. In subsequent articles and volumes, using St. Thomas as his guide, he develops and clarifies his thought. Numerous attacks upon his position force him, not to forsake his teaching, but to refine its expression. His last work, Le problème du mal, shows that fifty-five years have served only to deepen his convictions concerning the mystery of God the unknowable.[2]

At the conclusion of his analysis of Fouillée's views on the unknowable, Sertillanges sketches the main features of his position.

> As philosophers we stoutly declare that divinity is inaccessible to science; that it is unknowable not only for us but for every being whatever it is unless it be God. . . . Further we avow our powerlessness not only to know God by ourselves and through our

---

[1] A. D. Sertillanges, "L'inconnaissable selon M. Fouillée," Revue thomiste, I (1893), 577-597.

[2] A. D. Sertillanges, Le problème du mal (Paris: Aubier, 1951), II, 137-140.

> own resources alone; but also to demonstrate in rigorous fashion the possibility for him to communicate himself to us and to teach us what he is.[1]

Further on he sounds the keynote of his thought, declaring that we can know that God is, but as philosophers we shall always be ignorant of what he is. No matter what the efforts of unaided human intelligence, God will always be hidden, eternally separated, eternally inaccessible.[2]

A. God's Cognoscibility

A full exposition of Sertillanges'views on man's knowledge of the nature of God appeared in 1906. Sertillanges believes that the wave of agnosticism stemming principally from the school of criticism is in reaction to the extreme intellectualism of a misunderstood or degenerate scholasticism. On the one hand, agnosticism is a negation of God; on the other, extreme intellectualism leads to anthropomorphism. In a series of articles written for Revue de philosophie, later published in booklet form, Sertillanges sets himself the task of delineating a position that avoids the extremes of agnosticism and of anthropomorphism.

---

[1] Sertillanges, "L'inconnaissable selon M. Fouillée," pp. 594-595
"Comme philosophes nous déclarons hautement que la divinité est inaccessible à la science; qu'elle est inconnaissable non seulement pour nous, mais pour tout être quel qu'il soit, à moins qu'il ne soit Dieu. ... Bien plus nous confessons notre impuissance non pas seulement à connaître Dieu de nous-mêmes et par nos seules resources; mais encore à démontrer d'une manière rigoureuse la possibilité pour lui de se communiquer à nous, et de nous apprendre ce qu'il est."

[2] Ibid., p. 595.

1. Man's way of knowing

Sertillanges first discusses how and in what measure man can know God. Man's knowledge has its origin in the senses and can go only as far as it is led by sensible things. Man cannot achieve natural knowledge of God's essence because sensible effects are not equal to the essence of God. He can know from effects that God exists and can determine by way of causality, negation, and eminence the conditions that the role of the first principle demands. Actually the attributes of God are reached before God and an analysis of the role and conditions of the first principle merely answers the question: An Deus sit? Sertillanges believes that the whole of theodicy is an answer to the query: Is there a God?[1]

Seeking to establish whether the attributes predicated of the divinity are symbolic, formal, or analogical Sertillanges asks (1) whether the names given to God are the names of a role or of a person, (2) whether these names qualify the divine substance in a positive or negative way, (3) in what way is the divine substance qualified by them. Sertillanges offers three reasons to show that these names are not applied simply and strictly in terms of a role. If saying God is intelligent means only that he is the cause of intelligence, then he can be called a plant, an animal, heat, light, etc., since he is the cause of these. The names would express only his causality, and a form of agnosticism would result. Secondly, every effect proceeds from an agent by reason of something

---

[1] A. D. Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme?" Revue de philosophie, VIII (1906), 131-133.

that is in the agent so that what is in the effect must have some relation to that which is in the agent. Finally, common sense intends to qualify in a certain manner God as he is in himself.[1]

Admitting that names are applied to God substantially, Sertillanges next considers whether their sense is negative or positive. Sertillanges, following St. Thomas, maintains that the names do not have only a negative meaning. If that were the case, one word would not have more meaning than another. If the statement, "God is good," means only that he is not bad, then it follows that the statement "he is a body," would signify that God is not a being in potency. Evidently this is not the intention of those speaking about God. "What is in their words must certainly be, under one form or under another, what they wish to put there." Finally, every negation is based on an existing thing. "If, therefore, ignorance, for example, is denied of God, it must be because of something positive that is in him and thus there must be posited in him, under one form or under another always, the opposite of ignorance."[2] Sertillanges concludes these observations on negation with a distinction that he considers to be of capital importance.

> It must be said then that at least some of the names predicated of God have a positive meaning when they refer to the divine substance. But it cannot be presumed that the positive meaning, which is relative to the objectivity such as it is of the

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 133-135.

[2] Ibid., p. 136.

concept, will not become negative when one qualifies not this objectivity itself but the value of definition it implies.[1]

To the question of the qualification of the divine substance by the divine names, Sertillanges answers with a quotation that he considers to be a masterful summary of the Thomistic doctrine on the divine names.

> These names express God, so far as our intellects know Him. Since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows Him as far as creatures represent Him. Now it was shown above that God prepossesses in Himself all the perfections of creatures, being Himself simply and universally perfect. Hence every creature represents Him and is like Him so far as it possesses some perfection; yet it represents Him not as something of the same species or genus, but as the excelling principle of whose form the effects fall short although they derive some kind of likeness thereto, even as the forms of inferior bodies represent the sun. This was explained above in treating of the divine perfection. Therefore the aforesaid names signify the divine substance, but in an imperfect manner, even as creatures represent it imperfectly. So when we say, God is good, the meaning is not, God is the cause of goodness or God is not evil; but the meaning is, Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God, and in a more excellent way.[2]

2. The value of man's knowledge of God

In answer to the further questions of what it is possible to say with truth about God and what value these statements have, Sertillanges draws principally from St. Thomas' exposition in the Summa contra gentiles, Book I, Chapters XXX to XXXVI. Every perfection of creatures is found

---

[1] Ibid.
"Il faut donc dire que certains, du moins, parmi les noms appliqués à Dieu ont un sens positif, se référant à la substance divine sans préjuger, d'ailleurs, si la positivité dont on parle, et qui est relative à l'objectivité telle quelle du concept que nous exprimons, ne tournera pas au négatif, quand il s'agira de qualifier non plus cette objectivité elle-même, mais la valeur de définition qu'elle implique."

[2] S.T., I, 13, 2. (Italics added by Sertillanges)

in God in another and more eminent way; Therefore, names that unqualifiedly signify a perfection without defect are predicated of God and creatures. Any name that implies the imperfection of the created mode can be said of God only metaphorically. Finally, every name that indicates the transcendent mode of a perfection is applied only to God. However, this explanation, according to Sertillanges, only skims the surface of the difficulty because certain names are applicable for what they signify but not for the way in which they signify. Sertillanges points to this distinction between res significata and modus significandi as a mainspring for St. Thomas in that which pertains to the divine names.[1]

Because man's concepts have their origin in his sense findings, their mode of expression is limited by the sensible. Whatever man signifies is either an essence, like goodness, or a subject possessing this essence, as when something is said to be good. But the goodness thus signified is not subsistent and so cannot be applied to God in whom there is nothing that is not subsistent. While the word good designates a subsistent, it also implies composition. Since in God all is one, the word good as understood in this instance cannot be applied to him. According to human modes of expression, to say that God is good would mean that God possesses the quality called goodness under a distinct and definite form. But God possesses goodness only as the principle of being, and, inasmuch as being includes all essences and their perfections, no perfection can be denied to him who is their source. Since in God these

---

[1]Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme?" pp. 141-142.

perfections are neither divided nor limited, there is no possibility of a distinction in God between essence, qualities, or attributes.[1]

Even being, Sertillanges points out, cannot be predicated of God without restriction or without correction of our concepts. St. Thomas' formula "No name is predicated univocally of God and of creatures," is universal in its application.[2] Sertillanges goes on to interpret benignly Pascal's frequently quoted lines: "If there is a God, he is infinitely incomprehensible. . . . We are incapable of knowing either what he is or if he is."[3] It is not a question here of the impossibility of demonstrating the existence of God but rather of the impossibility of linking to God, de plano, even the purest of our concepts, that of being. Admittedly the word being is superior to all others, but it, too, expresses either a subject or a quality. The being of which we speak is either res existens or actus existentis. But when we say "God is" we do not intend to posit God as a subject that is existent nor to attribute being to God as a quality or an essence. The proposition "God is" uses the word "is" only as the logical bond of a true proposition. It expresses "a unilateral relation of esse, since created being furnishes one of the terms of the relation; the other term remains the purely unknowable which cannot be named except through the former term."[4] God

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 142-143 [2] S.T., I, 13, 5.

[3] Blaise Pascal, Pensées sur la vérité de la religion chrétienne, ed. Jacques Chevalier (Paris: J. Gabalda et fils, 1927), p. 261.

[4] A. D. Sertillanges, Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme (Paris: Bloud et Cie., 1908), p.26.
"Il exprime simplement une relation unilatérale de esse, l'être créé fournissant de cette relation l'un des termes; l'autre restant à l'inconnaissable tout pur, et ne pouvant se nommer que par le premier."

is above being and therefore he cannot be the subject of any science not even metaphysics. God is not in being, being is in God. The proposition "God is" does not posit God as being but rather as super-being.[1]

Being, Sertillanges continues, may be taken in two ways. First, it signifies the act of being, that which puts a nature into the reality of existence. In this sense being is a thing designated and qualified proportionately to the nature in question. To know one is to know the other. Thus, to say "God is" or "God is being" is to attempt to define him, to put him in the category of being, and thus answer the question quid sit rather than an sit. Taken in the second sense being is only a logical bond, a being of reason. It says nothing of itself that qualifies its subject as a being or that affirms its reality (positivité). To say "blindness is" or "evil is" does not confer positive existence on either of the two.[2]

In the case of God the problem of nature is equally unusual. In fact it is so unusual that it can legitimately be said that God has no nature or that his nature is inaccessible. And so is his act of being. This does not mean that God is a privation; he is rather super-real because he must ground the real. However, from this it does not follow that he is a being. Since God transcends every difference his case is unparalleled.[3]

In saying "blindness is" we mean that there are blind men and thus we signify both a privation and indirectly a real being (une positivité) that supports it. In the case of God the inverse is true. Starting from the universe in its indigent reality, we say "God is,"

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 26-27. [2] Ibid., pp. 27-28. [3] Ibid., p. 28.

and the proposition refers directly to God and indirectly, as the ultimate foundation of this truth, to the indigence of creatures. In both cases the being contained in the judgment of existence abstracts from the reality or non-reality of its object. Consequently to say God is, and this is a true proposition, does not qualify God as being.[1]

Further defining his position, Sertillanges emphasizes that St. Thomas holds without restriction that the best human names can both be denied and affirmed of God. To say that God is not good is true in the transcendent sense that God has neither essence, nor quality, nor perfection defined as such. Likewise the statement that God is "he who is" holds true as contrasted with the atheistic statement that God is not. But it is also true to say God is not, in order to signify that as the postulate of being he is not included within the categories of being.[2]

To eliminate equivocation and negation it is necessary to signify the mode of eminence. To do this, one would have to know God in himself, and this is impossible for man. The only way man can connote the divine mode is by negation, as when he says that God is eternal to indicate that God is not in time, or by relation, as when man says that God is the supreme good to signify in what way God is good. The expressions supreme good, first intelligence, first being mean that God is good, intelligent, being in a way that is suitable to him who is the source of all goodness, all intelligence and all being. But, Sertillanges declares, this teaches nothing. We refuse to deny anything to the first

---

[1] Ibid., p. 29.

[2] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

cause; we affirm that all that implies perfection in his work must be accorded to God. However, this affirmation adds nothing to the previous negation, since it is only the positive form of the previous refusal to deny any perfection to God. With St. Thomas Sertillanges concludes that "We cannot grasp what God is, but only what he is not, and how other things are related to him."[1] Here again, he continues, it is clearly stated that it is impossible to ge beyond the question an est, since any terms answering the question quid est have only a negative or relative value. As a final clarification of this doctrine Sertillanges quotes a passage from De potential,[2] that shows again that every affirmation concerning God can be denied because it is insufficient and recourse must be had to a superior mode.[3]

3. The safeguard of human knowledge of God

Between the doctrines of agnosticism and anthropomorphism, Sertillanges places the doctrine of analogy. Agnosticism proposes that God is wholly inaccessible because he is outside all genera and species.

---

[1] S.C.G., I, 30.

[2] De potentia, VII, 5 ad 2.
"When Dionysius says that the negations of these names of God are true he does not assert that the affirmations are false but insufficient: for as to the thing signified, which is in him in a certain way, as has been shown, they are truly predicated of God; but as to the way in which they signify they can be denied to God: for each of these names signifies a certain defined quality and so cannot be assigned to God as it was said. And therefore they can be absolutely denied of God because they are not appropriate as far as the way of signifying."

[3] Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphism?" pp. 145-147.

Descriptions of God are not only insufficient but they are altogether false. The human mind tries to express God according to its experience but its effort is arbitrary and merely covers human ignorance with symbols. Sertillanges finds the truth of agnosticism in its tenet that none of man's notions of God define him. The error of agnosticism, he says, lies in the fact that it discovers nothing positive in the affirmation; God is source. On the other hand, there are many who understand the word analogy in the current sense of resemblance so that the same concept would admit of only a difference of degree or value. This approach leads to anthropomorphism. It is not enough, insists Sertillanges, to say that from the point of view of definition all statements about God are inadequate. Rather it must be said that to the extent that they attempt to define God they are inapplicable.[1]

Analogy means proportion or relation, and according to St. Thomas' teaching it lies in between univocal and equivocal predication. Sertillanges dismisses analogy of attribution as an alternative way of predicating human and divine names since that presupposes a reality logically anterior to God in which he would participate. Analogy of human and divine names is not furnished by a relation of two realities to a third but by a certain direct relation between one of the two terms and the second. This category of relationship admits of two kinds: proportion and proportionality. In analogy of proportion there is some agreement between two things because of a relation of determinate distance, degree, or measure. This kind of predication does not obtain between God

---

[1]Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme?" pp. 149-151.

and creatures, since there is no relation of direct similitude between them. No attribute is predicated of God as something that he has in common with creatures. In other words, says Sertillanges citing St. Thomas,[1] there is no element common to the definition of God and the definition of man. This is evidently true because God is undefinable what we say of him can be equally denied of him.[2]

The answer then lies in proportionality, that is, a proportion of proportions, as when it is said that fuel is to a machine what food is to an animal. The divine proportionality has this peculiarity. God is infinite and all that is in God is God and thus infinite. If one establishes a proportion between man and his intelligence and God and his intelligence the result represents nothing by itself.

$$\frac{M}{1} = \frac{\quad}{\quad}$$

This proportion, which is merely a mathematical convention, "manifests again in a most striking fashion the truth of the proposition that the value of definition of all that we can say of God is nil."[3]

However, between the finite and the infinite there can be a proportionality and so the creature stands to the things that are its own as God does to those which belong to him. This relationship, according to Sertillanges, defines nothing, but it is a useful means of attaining truth since it can enter into consideration as a consequent of preceding relations and as a principle of further relations.[4]

---

[1] De veritate, II, ad 6.

[2] Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme?" pp. 152-160

[3] Ibid., p. 160.

[4] Ibid., p. 161.

Sertillanges affirms unequivocally that in the formulas in which the divine is expressed, St. Thomas sacrifices all value of definition. These formulas have only the value of pointing to a relation, that of first source to its derivatives. Between symbolism and anthropomorphism St. Thomas places the analogy based on the relation of dependence that binds the relative to the transcendent and allows a certain qualification of the latter through the former.[1]

To emphasize his position Sertillanges speaks of an absolute nihilism in regard to the concept of God. When God is called cause or being, it is not in order to define him but to indicate that the whole universe depends on him. Affirmations about God do not qualify him in himself but only in regard to his creatures. Since God has no real relation with creatures it is more accurate to say that these expressions qualify him because of the relations of creatures to him.[2] "Thus we are reduced to an absolute nihilism with regard to the notion of God to the definition of God, to the concept of God. Properly speaking, we have neither notion, nor definition nor concept of him."[3]

The position on man's knowledge of God that Sertillanges has constantly and consistently maintained has frequently been called into

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[2] Sertillanges, Agnosticisme ou Anthropomorphisme, pp. 41-44.

[3] Ibid., p. 44.
"Nous voici donc au nihilisme absolu relativement à la notion de Dieu, à la définition de Dieu, au concept de Dieu. C'est-à-dire que nous n'avons de lui, à proprement parler, ni notion, ni définition, ni concept."

question. Gardair, Romeyer, Penido, Descoqs, Manser and Maritain are the most significant critics. A study of the objections of each of these men will indicate the main difficulties involved in Sertillanges' teaching. It will also lead to a better grasp of the complexity of the question and to a more comprehensive view of the Thomistic position.

B. Opposition to Sertillanges' Interpretation

1. Gardair

Sertillanges' first article on agnosticism or anthropomorphism appeared in February 1906. Gardair, also using Revue de philosophie as his vehicle of expression, takes issue with Sertillanges in June of the same year. He seeks to disprove Sertillanges' contention that it is impossible to link God with any of man's concepts, even the most refined among them, that of being. He believes that St. Thomas favors a more positive analogical knowledge of the divine being than that which Sertillanges allows.

Gardair agrees that man cannot know properly what the act of being is in God. Since God's essence is identical with his "to be" (être), to know his "to be" (être) would be to know his essence and this knowledge is beyond man's capacity. However, man can proceed from effects to a first cause and affirm that God is. If one admits that man's judgments conform with reality, then the formula God is, "which signifies: there is a God or God is real, is in conformity with the positive reality of God. . . . "[1]

Gardair founds this reasoning on the following passage from

---

[1]J. Gardair, "L'Etre divin," Revue de philosophie, VIII (1906), 600.

St. Thomas.

> To be can mean either of two things. It may mean the act of essence, or it may mean the composition of a proposition effected by the mind in joining a predicate to a subject. If we take "to be" in the first sense, we cannot understand God's existence nor his essence; we must take it in the second sense. We know that this proposition which we form about God when we say God is, is true; and this we know from his [God's] effects.[1]

Then he goes further and states that "to be" is the very characteristic of the nature of God, of the divine essence. Sertillanges interprets St. Thomas' primary reason for using "he who is" as the most proper name of God as follows: "First the word being [être] does not express my essence and because of this it is particularly fitting to God who has not a defined or definable essence."[2] Gardair declares that this statement of St. Thomas' thought considerably weakens the original statement which he then goes on to quote.

> This name He Who Is, is most properly applied to God for three reasons:--First, because of its signification. For it does not signify form, but simply existence itself. Hence since the existence of God is His essence itself, which can be said of no other, it is clear that among other names this one especially denominates God for everything is denominated by its form.[3]

He argues that the word being "applies really to God but in a fuller, richer, more excellent sense than to any creature, since the being of God is the divine nature, the whole divine nature, while the being of a

---

[1] S.T., I, 3,4, ad 2.

[2] Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme," p. 144. "C'est d'abord que le mot être n'exprime aucune essence, et que par là il convient particulièrement à Dieu, qui n'a pas d'essence définie ou définissable."

[3] S.T., I, 13,11.

creature is not its essence, since this essence is able not to be."[1]

Then Gardair takes issue with a further comment Sertillanges makes on the word being, namely: "The being of which we speak is always either res existens or actus existentis and in both cases one must say: absit hoc a magno Deo."[2] Gardair replies that although man's idea of God combines the notion of reality and that of act he does not confuse God with realities composed of essence and existence. Further, if the names man gives God are not exact, it would be improper to designate as false the notion he has of God in thus naming him, since man does not think that God admits of any composition, not even that of essence and existence. "We name him, we affirm him, by way of composition, but we think he is simple, and thus our thought is not false."[3]

Seeking to preserve the value of analogy, Gardair looks to divine exemplarity. The actual being of creatures has some relationship of

---

[1]Gardair, "L'Etre divine," p. 601.
"N'y a-t-il dans cette démonstration la preuve et l'affirmation énergique que ce que nous entendons par le mot être s'applique réellement à Dieu, mais dans un sens plus plein, plus riche, plus excellent qu'à toute créature, puisque l'être de Dieu, c'est la nature divine, toute la nature divine, tandis que l'être d'une créature, ce n'est pas son essence, cette essence pouvant ne pas être."

[2]Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme?" p. 144.
"L'être dont nous parlons est toujours ou bien res existens, ou bien actus existentis, et dans les deux cas il faut dire: Absit hoc a magno Deo."

[3]Gardair, "L'Etre divin," pp. 601-602.
"Nous le nommons, nous l'affirmons, sous formes composées, mais nous pensons qu'il est simple, et par la notre pensée n'est pas fausse."

resemblance with God "since he has made them only according to an exemplary type that he has in himself. This relationship of resemblance is precisely the analogy between creature and God." Further on Gardair questions whether there cannot be some kind of direct resemblance between the divine being and created being. He finds in the proportionality proposed by St. Thomas a kind of direct resemblance between the first terms, that is, between 6 and 4, and between the prince and the pilot. Restating the proportionality 6:3 = 4:2 as 6:4 = 3:2 shows a direct relationship between 6 and 4; between the prince and the pilot there is a certain direct relationship, namely, the capacity and power of governing. Gardair gives the following summary of his argument.

> As a resumé it can be said not only that there is such a proportionality between man and God, but even that there is a certain relation, a certain direct proportion of one to the other. For example, man is to God as the work is to the artist who made it, as the subject is to his sovereign. But what one cannot say is that there is a proportion of quantity between the creature and the creator; for there is an infinite distance between what God is and what a creature is.[1]

Next Gardair quotes and attacks the following statement of Sertillanges.

> St. Thomas repeats in several places that God is not properly the matter of any science not even of metaphysics. Yet the latter is indeed the science of being, of being as such (ens in quantum ens) and God should enter into it under this aspect, if, de plano, the notion of being were applicable. Of course not, he transcends it

---

[1] Gardair, "L'Etre divin," p. 606.

"En résumé, on peut dire, non seulement qu'il y a une telle proportionnalité entre l'homme et Dieu, mais qu'il y a même un certain rapport, une certaine proportion directe de l'un à l'autre. Par exemple, l'homme est à Dieu ce qu l'oeuvre est à l'artiste qui l'a faite, ce que le sujet est à son souverain. Mais ce que l'on ne peut pas dire, c'est qu'il y ait une proportion de quantité entre la créature et le Créateur; car il y a une distance infinie entre ce qu'est Dieu et ce qu'est la créature."

> and it is only under the title of Principle of being, ineffable and unnamable principle that God enters into metaphysical speculation.[1]

Gardair maintains that it is evident that metaphysics and natural theology are the same science and that, while the immediate subject of this science is the being common to all created being, its goal is to consider also intellectual substances and God himself. The notion of being leads the metaphysician to posit God as the first act and to know him in some way not only as principle but also as supreme model of all beings.[2]

In a subsequent article Gardair maintains that a crucial element in the dispute is the different views that he and Sertillanges hold concerning the extent of human knowledge. Gardair says that for Sertillanges our knowledge is radically unable to reach God, because he is totally outside of our experience. He interprets Sertillanges as holding for the entire, exclusive relativity of man's knowledge. When Sertillanges says God is, he does so merely to satisfy his reason because in the face of the insufficiency of things he cannot prevent himself from positing a principle sufficient to explain them. The first cause that we call God is only a postulate of speculative reason.[3]

---

[1] Sertillanges, "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme," pp. 144-145.
"St. Thomas répète à plusieur reprises que Dieu n'est proprement la matière d'aucune science, pas même de la métaphysique. Celle-ci pourtant est bien la science de l'être, de l'être en tant que tel (ens in quantum ens), et Dieu y devrait entrer à ce titre, si, de plano, la notion d'être lui était applicable. Mais non, il lui est transcendant, et ce n'est qu'a titre de Principe d'être, principe ineffable et innommable que Dieu intervient dans la spéculation métaphysique."

[2] Gardair, "L'Etre divin," pp. 612-613.

[3] J. Gardair, "La connaissance de Dieu," Revue de philosophie, IX (1906), 446-447.

Gardair shows another sharp divergency with Sertillanges when he considers their respective views on the verb "to be." He reiterates that for him the formula "God is" conforms to the positive reality of God. The verb "to be" is not only a logical bond; it is the expression of the real being of the thing named. If this thing is positive, the verb expresses its positive being. Privations are sometimes thought of as positive beings, but actually they indicate that a subject lacks something. The proposition "God is" cannot mean that God is a negation or privation but rather that God is positive reality, the most positive of all realities.[1]

On the other hand, Gardair sees Sertillanges as admitting the reality of created things only. He interprets him as seeing the verb "to be" in the expression "God is" as a purely logical link, exclusively mental, a bond necessary for our intelligence in order to unite the two extreme terms of the judgment. Going further, he says that when Sertillanges designates God as the source of being, although he claims to express reality, he is actually admitting as real only that which can be experimentally observed. It is not possible to know, in Sertillanges' view, whether the principle or source which the insufficiency of created being seems to demand does really exist.[2]

While admitting that the divine being is superior to all created being, Gardair challenges Sertillanges' statement, "If God is, we are not;

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 447-449.

[2] Ibid., p. 450.

if we are, God is not." Denying that being cannot at the same time signify that which is self-sufficient and that which is not, Gardair prefers to say, "We are, therefore, God is; we are because God is."[1] According to Gardair, St. Thomas' theory of being by essence and being by participation contradicts Sertillanges' theory. He maintains that since St. Thomas demonstrates that God has in himself in an absolute and supereminent way all the perfections of creatures precisely because he is self-subsistent being, it follows that the analogy of created being and divine being is one of resemblance and not only one of derivation. For Sertillanges analogy consists only in the fact that created being comes from God; for Gardair analogy also includes resemblance, an imperfect imitation of God in creatures.[2]

2. Romeyer

One of the most scathing attacks against Sertillanges is that of Reverend Blaise Romeyer, S.J.[3] Failing to recognize a direct quotation from the Summa contra gentiles, Romeyer writes,

> Father Sertillanges really dares to write and publish this judgment as definitive in his opinion. 'We do not know what God is, but only what he is not and how other things are related to him.' This is the very thesis of Maimonides combatted by St. Thomas. Yet Sertillanges does not hesitate to attribute it to Thomas: "This sentence, he continues, expresses at the same time the foundation, the limits, the character partially affirmative, partially and

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] J. Gardair, "La transcendance de Dieu," Revue de philosophie, X (1907), 104-105.

[3] Blaise Romeyer, "St. Augustin," Archives de philosophie, VI (1928), 606-633.

> ultimately negative of all our attributions. And this is the thomistic thesis concerning the knowledge of God.[1]

In spite of the bias of these opening sentences Romeyer's position is significant because it is so opposed to that of Sertillanges.

Using Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste and the notes of Sertillanges' translation of the first twenty-six questions of the Summa theologica[2] as his sources, Romeyer insinuates that Sertillanges' views resemble more the agnosticism of Le Roy than the doctrine of St. Thomas. According to Romeyer, Sertillanges fails to understand the important distinction in theodicy between the negative and the positive way. Père Sertillanges, he says, maintains that St. Thomas would allow only negative and relative terms with regard to God. Further, Sertillanges fails to show that St. Thomas holds that names having a positive and absolute value can be attributed to God. These names cannot express the infinitely perfect way God is what he is; nevertheless, they somehow express what he is. Romeyer insists that in addition to knowledge by the negative and relative way, St. Thomas admits also knowledge through the affirmative and absolute way.

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 618-619.
"Un de ses disciples contemporains les plus eminents, les plus glorieux en France, le P. Sertillanges, ose bien écrire et publier cette sentence définitive à son sens: 'Nous ne savons pas ce que Dieu est, mais seulement ce qu'il n'est pas et quelle relation soutient avec lui tout le reste? C'est la thèse même de Maimonide combattu par saint Thomas. Le P. Sertillanges pourtant n'hésite pas à l'attribuer à Thomas: 'Cette phrase, poursuit-il, exprime tout ensemble le fondement, les limites, le caractère partiellement affirmatif, partiellement et finalement négatif de toutes nos attributions. Et c'est la thèse thomiste touchant la connaissance de Dieu' (Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste, p. 80).

[2] S. Thomas d'Aquin, Some théologique, Vols. I-III: Dieu, traduction française par A. D. Sertillanges (Paris: Desclée et Cie; 1926).

Romeyer says that according to Sertillanges we know nothing about what constitutes God. He defies Sertillanges to find anywhere in the writings of St. Thomas the equivalent of his statement, "We do not know in any way, in anything, to any degree what God is." He further maintains that Sertillanges' interpretation of the two ways of using the term "to be" is only in superficial conformity with the text. The distinction between substantial being and the copulative "to be" is made only to reject all knowledge of God which would tell how he is in his actual reality. Romeyer contends that "we know what God is: a personal, intelligent and loving Spirit; but we cannot succeed in representing to ourselves how he is what he is."[1]

3. Manser

Manser accepts Sertillanges' assertion that Thomas does not admit of any definition of God's being or goodness or wisdom. But he finds that Sertillanges' denial of any positive knowledge of God's essence jeopardizes all analogical knowledge of God and even the knowledge of God's existence. Manser traces the entire difficulty to a misunderstanding of the analogy of proportionality. God exists; things exist. Existence is thus predicated intrinsically, i.e., quidditatively of both, but only by an identity of proportionality. This leaves the measure of inner being of both God and creatures untouched. Since existence can be predicated proportionately of God and creatures, man has a certain quidditative knowledge of God. Without it the worth of the proofs for the

---

[1] Romeyer, p. 621.
"Nous savons ce qu'est Dieu; Esprit personnel, intelligent et aimant; mais nous ne pouvons réussir à nous représenter de façon positive comment il est ce qu'il est."

existence of God is nil since for St. Thomas an absolutely negative knowledge of a thing is no knowledge at all.[1]

4. Penido

In his book Le rôle de l'analogie en théologie dogmatique Penido suggests that by insisting so much on eminenter rather than formaliter Sertillanges has deformed St. Thomas' thought. Sertillanges says, in fact, that his opinion differs from that of Maimonides uniquely in its manner of expression (uniquement à la façon de parler.) Penido agrees and maintains that both philosophers are so obsessed by the idea of God's transcendence and have such an inadequate notion of being that they are prevented from grasping the radical difference between mixed perfections and pure perfections. Starting with an inaccurate idea of eminence, they seem to imply that an essential attribute destroys the oneness of God, circumscribes the infinite and defines the ineffable.[2]

Penido thinks that the approach of both Maimonides and Sertillanges is too exclusively logical and psychological. Their criticism of the divine names is excellent but it must be limited to the modus significandi. Sertillanges would then be correct in saying that all our concepts fail when we think of God. Such criticism calls for further explanation. Negative attributes and the names of a role must be affirmed but so must pure perfections. These two approaches complete each other and cannot be said to differ uniquely as to manner of expression. Penido sees

---

[1]G. M. Manser, "Das Wesen des Thomismus," Divus Thomas, VII (1929), 387-389.

[2]M. T. L. Penido, Le rôle de l'analogie en théologie dogmatique (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1931), p. 171.

Sertillanges as insinuating that being is a genus, and that there are no transcendentals. In addition, Penido asserts that if Sertillanges can posit a source that is all plenitude he can also affirm that the source is formally good, powerful, wise, and the like.[1]

5. Descoqs

In his critique of Sertillanges' theory Descoqs does not hesitate to say that, at least in its expression it leads to radical agnosticism. He claims that according to Sertillanges man's knowledge of God is reduced to no less than total ignorance. If one accepts this theory and its consequences, he can speak no more about the problem of God since he would not be able to know the meaning of the term existence as applied to God.[2]

Like Penido, Descoqs infers from Sertillanges' limiting being to the predicaments that being for Sertillanges is not a transcendental. If being is not a transcendental and as such does not apply to God, then it is impossible to know the reality of any name as it is applied to God. The expression "source of being" becomes a meaningless metaphor that has no more significance than being, cause and substance when they are predicated of God.[3]

Descoqs makes a vigorous attack on Sertillanges' interpretation of the verb "is" as being a mere copulative in the sentence "God is." According to Sertillanges, the verb "is" when used to express the truth of a

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 171-173.

[2] Pedro Descoqs, Praelectiones theologiae naturalis (Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1935), II, 819.

[3] Ibid., p. 820.

proposition names nothing. It is only a predicate that can be applied equally well to a thing that has no real existence. If this is the case, Descoqs argues that to say "God is" is to affirm nothing about God. Since the reality of his being is not affirmed, the proposition is stripped of all its content and, therefore, of all truth. Being and truth are in effect interchangeable.[1]

6. Maritain

Jacques Maritain takes issue with Père Sertillanges on two points: (1) his quasi literal translation of certain Latin expressions and (2) his interpretation of "is" in the statement "God is." Maritain claims that Sertillanges exposes the reader to serious misconceptions when he translates "quid est ipsius Dei semper nobis occultum remanet" (De veritate, 2, 1, ad 9), as "We do not know God in any way, in any thing, in any degree." He terms inexact the quasi literal translation "we cannot grasp what God is" for the Latin expression "non de Deo capere possumus quid est." Maritain would preserve the original form of the Latin text and translate, "We cannot grasp of God what He is."

Nevertheless, Maritain does not agree with Romeyer's criticism of Father Sertillanges nor does he consider him justified in accusing Sertillanges of semi-agnosticism. However, Maritain finds that the expressions Sertillanges uses to bring out God's transcendence can lead to grave misunderstandings. He would not say, "We do not know what God is," but "We do not know what God is in Himself." Nor would he say "We know what God is," but "We know imperfectly what God is, without being

---

[1] Ibid., p. 822.

able to grasp His essence in itself."[1]

On the basis of St. Thomas' texts (De potentia, q. 7, a.2, ad 1 and S.T., I, 3, 4, ad 2), Maritain challenges the following interpretation of Sertillanges: "In this proposition, God is, the verb to be does not signify real being, being considered as an attribute: it is only the logical link in a true proposition and is used in a sense which would be equally authentic in a thing without real existence, as when we say 'Blindness is.'"[2] Sertillanges seems to forget, writes Maritain, that when we say "Blindness is," we affirm only the logical bond between a predicate and a subject because blindness is only a being of reason, but in the case of God, who is not merely a being of reason, we affirm "both this logical link and the perfection, act of being attributed by means of this link to the subject of the proposition as a real esse and all that is most real, known by analogy." Being, life, goodness, unity can be attributed to God without positing in God any composition of subject and attribute because this composition concerns only our thought. Furthermore, Maritain asks, if St. Thomas holds that with reference to God to be signifies only a logical copula why does St. Thomas in the same article (7,2) of the De potentia attribute real being to God by affirming that God is being itself (ad 8) and that the being of God is distinguished from every other being by the fact that it is self-subsistent being (ad 5).

---

[1]Jacques Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge; newly translated from the fourth French edition under Gerald B. Phelan 'New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), pp. 425-429.

[2]S. Thomas d'Aquin, Somme théologique, Vol. II: Dieu . . . , 383.

In conclusion Maritain suggests that Thomism should not be identified with modern systems by means of ambiguity.[1]

C. Conclusion

The most serious aspect of the foregoing criticisms is the charge that Sertillanges' presentation of St. Thomas' position is inaccurate and agnostic in expression if not in intention. The final and most refined exposition of Sertillanges' understanding of the cognoscibility of God according to St. Thomas may be found in Le Christianisme et les philosophies. In this work, Sertillanges does not seem to deviate from the genuine thought of St. Thomas.

In discussing the nature of God, Sertillanges declares that because of the limitations of human language one may speak of an agnosticism of definition but not of simple agnosticism.[2] God cannot be defined because he is a perfect plenitude. God's essence is his very being, which is equivalent to saying "he is." In this sense he can have no attributes, since an attribute would add something to his being and God would not be being itself.[3] All that can be known about God as far as his definition is concerned, is contained in the statement: he is. What he is in the strict sense of the term escapes us. Even in the judgment God is, the term "to be" is considered as the copulative of a true proposition, not as signifying the divine being itself.[4]

---

[1] Maritain, pp. 427-429.

[2] A. D. Sertillanges, Le christianisme et les philosophies (Paris: Aubier, ed. Montaigne, n.d.), I, 270.

[3] Ibid., pp. 268-269.

[4] Ibid., p. 269.

Nevertheless, the names and the qualifications given to God are not erroneous, or else the word God would be meaningless. These divine attributes have to do with man's way of knowing and represent, as to their multiplicity and their mode of expression, the names of creatures.

> The names and the substantive or attributive appellations that we use in speaking of God apply to him 'because of a certain relation that he has with the things from which our intelligence draws its concepts', that is inasmuch as he is their cause, and that he cannot, therefore, be refused that which belongs to every cause in relation to its effect, namely a formal supereminence that explains it.[1]

The analogy here is indirect denoting a proportion or relationship and containing no element of definition because univocity is totally absent Thomas has always rejected the possibility of defining God's nature. In spite of the analogical validity and the practical value of the propositions of natural theology, in St. Thomas' doctrine, it is true to say, "We cannot grasp what God is, but only what he is not, and how other things are related to him."[2]

It is evident from this exposition[3] that Sertillanges insists that God is unknowable in the sense that he cannot be defined--man cannot know what God is in himself. He can obtain a very inadequate indication

---

[1] Ibid., p. 272.
"Les noms et les appellations, substantives ou attributives, que nous employons en parlant de Dieu, s'appliquent à lui 'en raison d'un certain rapport qu'il entretient avec les choses où notre intelligence puise ses concepts,' c'est à dire en tant qu'il est leur cause, et qu'on ne peut donc lui refuser ce qui appartient à toute cause par rapport à son effet, à savoir une suréminence formelle qui l'explique."

[2] S.C.G., I, 30.

[3] Sertillanges, Le christianisme ... , I, 268-273.

of the nature of God from the study of creatures. Man can know some of the perfections that must necessarily belong to God as the excelling principle of all being. Well-known texts from St. Thomas can be cited in support of this approach.[1] However, Thomistic texts can also be proposed which seem to grant a much greater knowledge than Sertillanges is willing to concede.[2] Gilson maintains that the dispute between those who emphasize the agnostic element and those who insist on the positive value of knowledge can go on as long as each side can discuss new texts to justify its thesis.[3]

At this point we are in a position to grasp more fully two seemingly opposing theses in the thought of St. Thomas: the unknowableness of God's essence as it is in itself and the cognoscibility of God through knowledge of creatures. This tension between man's knowing and not knowing God is well reflected in the following text.

> We cannot know the essence of God in this life as he really is in himself; but we know him accordingly as he is represented in the perfections of creatures; and thus the names imposed by us signify him in that manner only.[4]

If one or the other of these theses is neglected, we are led to conclude

---

[1] S.C.G., I, 30-35 and I Sent. dist XXII, q. II are suggested by Sertillanges as giving the basic doctrine in its most apparent form.

[2] Cf. S. T., I, 13, 2, ad 3 and 13, 3.

[3] Etienne Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 107.

[4] S.T., I, 13, 2 ad 3.

either that God is not ineffable or that we cannot know if he exists.

Careful consideration of Sertillanges' thought reveals that he gives great emphasis to the unknowableness of God. He deliberately stresses the impossibility of giving an adequate definition of God, because he finds that too many of St. Thomas' interpreters accept the position but ignore the consequences in their expositions.

CHAPTER IV

GOD AND CREATION

Closely related to the problem of God is the problem of creation for the creative activity is one with the creator. To seek the nature of creation is to try to determine the relation of the world to God and the relation of God to the world. Each of these relations involves the nature of God to the extent that man can know it through creatures. An authentic notion of the nature of God illuminates the problem of creation; an authentic notion of the nature of creation illuminates the problem of God.

Convinced that an inadequate notion of creation distorts the notion of God, of creatures, and of the relation of creatures to God Sertillanges has turned many times in books and articles to the problem of creation. His book La création et ses retentissements en philosophie is a synthesis of his previous reflections in this particular area. A consideration of this book together with other of his writings[1] that are

---

[1]A. D. Sertillanges, Le christianisme et les philosophies (Paris: Aubier, n.e.), I, 261-268; Foundations of Thomistic Philosophy, trans. Godfrey Anstruther (London: Sands and Co., 1931), Chap. IV; La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin (Paris: Aubier, 1940), I, 251-265; Somme théologique, I, 44-49, La création, traduction française par A. D. Sertillanges (Paris: Desclée et Cie., 1927); "La création," Revue thomiste, XXXIII (1928), 97-115; "L'idée de création dans saint Thomas d'Aquin," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, I (1907), 239-252; "La notion de création," Revue thomiste, XXXV (1930), 48-57; "La preuve de l'existence de Dieu et l'éternité du monde," Revue thomiste, V (1897), 453-468; 609-626; 746-762. "Note sur la preuve de l'existence de Dieu et l'éternité du monde," Revue thomiste, VI (1898), 367-378.

directly related to creation will reveal further aspects of Sertillanges' thought concerning the problem of God.

A. Creation and Beginning

One of the fundamental concerns that preoccupies Père Sertillanges is to show the independence of the idea of creation from that of the beginning of things in time. Sertillanges suggests that through a true understanding of the notion of creation errors and uncertainties engendered by anthropomorphic views can be avoided.[1]

To show the relationship between the idea of creation and the idea of beginning, Sertillanges first offers a brief historical account of the development of the idea of creation. In the thought of antiquity creation was understood as an arrangement from a primitive chaos, the cause of which was not sought. For the Greeks in general, God was the supreme representative of the divine Whole, the first in being but not the first in relation to the whole of being. God's transcendence was not recognized and so eternal necessity was attributed not to God alone but to the Whole.[2]

It is only in Christianity, according to Sertillanges, that the idea of creation properly speaking will hold sway and bring to the fore not a question of duration but of the total dependence of the real on the first cause.[3] The principal issue becomes that of determining whether anything whatsoever falls outside the causality of God, thus compromising the knowledge, authority, and power of the first principle.

---

[1] A. D. Sertillanges, L'idée de création et ses retentissements en philosophie (Paris: Aubier, 1945), p. 5.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 6.

Because of the gravity of the theoretical and practical consequences of this question, the Fathers of the Church stressed Biblical affirmations at the risk of confusing that which is essential in the idea of creation with that which is only one of its modalities--a beginning in time. St. Thomas brings the question back to the essential idea of a dependence in being, insisting that attempts to demonstrate a beginning serve only to give occasion to mock a faith whose content is indemonstrable by unaided reason.[1]

After this short historical account Sertillanges turns to a metaphysical critique of the ordinary way of thinking and speaking about creation. He shows a keen interest in stripping the approach to creation of all imaginative and anthropomorphic elements. At the same time he concedes that anthropomorphic thought and language are inevitable when treating of creation. Man's ways of thinking and speaking are conditioned by the sensible world and are thus inadequate to express the notion of creation, which involves the the transcendent. Creation concerns origins which spring from the divine absolute, and man knows only origins arising from created beings immersed in time and space. While admitting a certain anthropomorphism necessitated by ordinary expression of thought, Sertillanges seeks to exclude a doctrinal anthropomorphism that would falsify the divine and a conceptual and verbal anthropomorphism that is incompatible with the philosophical approach of his contemporaries.[2]

The following account of creation is presented by Sertillanges as a typical popular way of understanding creation. "In the beginning,

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[2] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

there was nothing except God. But one day God decided to call the world into existence. Through his power he created it and that was the first day."[1] Sertillanges then analyzes the inaccuracies to which the human mind falls prey when it considers the first day of the world.

"In the beginning there was nothing. . . . " The expression "in the beginning" designates a time, but it is impossible to have a time before time. It is a mere fiction to suppose two times, one before the existence of the world and one from its existence that would superimpose itself on the first. Then into this fictional duration is introduced a nothingness that exists. Nothing is nothing and occupies no place and has no relation to duration. There is formal contradiction in the idea of a moment when there is truly nothing, since time is a measure of existing things.[2]

"In the beginning there was nothing except God." By this expression God is situated in an empty duration. It is a kind of atheism to place God in a successive duration that precedes the world and then rejoins it. The duration of God is God. To imagine a duration before the world is but an indication of man's inability to represent God's eternity as it really is--a single immutable instant "that radiates on all temporal durations in such a way as to contain them all but without being coextensive with any of them."[3]

The next sentence in the account presents further difficulties. "One day God decides to give existence to the world." "One day" has no more existence than do "in the beginning" and "nothing." The first day that existed is the first day of the world. Surprising as it may seem,

---

[1] Ibid., p. 8. [2] Ibid., pp. 9-10. [3] Ibid., p. 11.

it is possible even for those who believe in a beginning of the world to say that the world has always existed. This statement is true because there was no time before the world, and the whole of the world includes the whole of duration. When St. Thomas says that the world was created on that day, he does not mean that time already existed at that moment to receive the world but rather that at that moment time began with the world in it like a precious liqueur with its container.[1]

The final step in describing creation is to represent God as making a decision and then putting it into execution. God decides to create, he speaks and all things are made. Viewed from God's standpoint, creation is act, but it is the very actuality of God. However, man's way of thinking is such that he is inclined to represent creation as an intermediate act between God and the world. Man thinks: first, God is; second, God acts. Initiative, command or at least an actual willing to bring about change is implied. This kind of reasoning is purely fictional; there is no action in God that is distinct from him. Nothing changes in God as a result of creation. God is and his effects are. There is no intermediary, no tertium quid that can be called his action.[2]

Thinking about creation in terms of a first day of the world leads to many inaccuracies. However, Sertillanges maintains that if one admits the eternity of the world, it is possible to succumb to essentially the same misconceptions and to create a new problem--the possibility or impossibility of infinite regress. One could avoid actualizing nothingness and imagining days before the first day, but the worst conception

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[2] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

would still be possible: the causality of God conceived as an intermediary between God and the world. Creation would be neither creator nor creature, and the only alternative would be that there is no creation or that something is outside the causality of God. The escape from this dilemma is a pantheistic one. The universe is not created by God; it is one with him.[1]

Père Sertillanges declares that the way to avoid the difficulties that are common to the partisans of the eternity of the world or of its non-eternity is a metaphysical approach to the problem of creation. Before undertaking this study, he attempts to show that the beginning of the world or its eternity is metaphysically an open question.

B. The Eternity or Non-Eternity of the World

1. Eternal creation and revelation

It is interesting to note that in Sertillanges' later years there is a significant change in his position concerning Christian belief in the non-eternity of the world. As early as 1897 he suggests that the idea of the eternity of the world is less obscure than that of an absolute beginning.[2] Nevertheless, in books and articles previous to 1944, he maintains that revelation obliges the Christian to affirm that the world began.

In a lecture concerning evolution and the thought of Père Teilhard de Chardin delivered in April, 1944, Sertillanges states that together with the renowned Jesuit he prefers the idea of an eternal world. At this

---

[1] Ibid., p. 19.

[2] Sertillanges, "La preuve de l'existence . . . ," p. 467.

time he expresses doubt as to whether creation in time is a matter of faith.[1] In his final synthesis, L'idée de création et ses retentissements en philosophie, Sertillanges discusses this problem in somewhat greater detail. He points to St. Thomas as holding that the novitas mundi is an article of faith with its foundation in Sacred Scripture, in the teaching of the Fathers and in the Councils. But, given the present state of hermeneutics, Père Sertillanges wonders whether expressions like the world, the oldest works of God, or those of a similar nature should be taken in a strict absolute sense. As for the Fathers of the Church and the tradition established by them, Sertillanges believes that they equated a world that does not begin and a world that to some extent escapes divine causality. If the thesis had been expressed in this way: the universe depends on God wholly and entirely but he has given it an infinite duration so that his own duration will be more manifest, Sertillanges maintains that the representatives of tradition would have readily accepted this idea.[2]

The Councils of Lateran and Vatican I are more explicit, since they speak clearly of creation effected ab initio temporis. Sertillanges questions whether the text is concerned with this particular circumstance or with the larger problem of excluding errors that would make the duration of God and his creatures the same or, worse yet, would remove something from God's creative activity, e.g., eternal matter. He concludes

---

[1] A. D. Sertillanges, L'univers et l'âme (Paris: Les éditions ouvrières, 1965), p. 30.

[2] Sertillanges, L'idée de création . . . , pp. 16-18.

that if St. Thomas' philosophical position concerning the eternity of the world were explicitly rejected by the Councils he would not hesitate. At present he would not condemn the physicist who defends an infinite regress of phenomena.[1]

2. Inconclusive arguments for the eternity of the world

Continuing his efforts to show that the eternity or non-eternity of the world is only a secondary consideration in the notion of creation, Sertillanges shows that the principal arguments for the eternity of the world are not conclusive. One such argument is that whatever is necessary in the world neither begins nor ends. To this Père Sertillanges answers with St. Thomas[2] that the statement is quite true but it already presupposes the world's existence. If the world did not exist, there would be neither necessity nor contingency in it. The second argument maintains that every new thing coming into the world presupposes something before it; every beginning is at the same time a continuation. Sertillanges replies that while the idea of a beginning implies a continuation it is wrong to demand something prior to a beginning. Finally, to the objection that since God and his creative action are eternal the world must also be eternal, Sertillanges responds that God is an absolutely free cause. Hence his effects are freely willed, and his will determines their duration as well as their nature and extension.[3]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 19. [2] S.T., I, 46, 1, ad 2.

[3] Sertillanges, L'idée de création . . . , pp. 20-23.

3. Inconclusive arguments for the non-eternity of the world

From as early as 1897 Sertillanges has publicly asserted that he believes that the notion of a beginning of creation is more obscure than the notion of the eternity of the universe. He devotes an entire chapter of his last work on creation to showing the impossibility of proving the fact of finite duration while at the same time he emphasizes the obscurity of the thesis of creation in time.

The first reason offered to show that the world began is that by their nature creatures are incapable of infinite duration. This reasoning would be valid if created things alone were in question. Without God the world could not subsist for a minute. However, the duration of things depends upon their cause, and there is no contradiction in saying that God freely wills the infinite duration of his creatures, even though some thinkers under the influence of imagination believe so. Thus, St. Bonaventure suggests that since God creates from nothing, nothingness must precede the world. In other words the world cannot come from nothing and be eternal at the same time. This argument results from imagining nothingness as a positive point of departure rather than as a pure negation.[1]

A second argument for the non-eternity of the world seems to confuse relative beginnings with an absolute beginning. Because an event in this world comes about at a given moment, it is imagined that the creative event also takes place at a given moment. Creation is not an event nor does it take place at a given moment of an eternal dura-

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

eternal duration.[1] It is likewise wrong to say that God, cause of the world necessarily precedes his effects. Apart from the fact that there are in nature causes that do not precede their effects in duration, in God there is no question of duration at all, since his eternity transcends all precession and all succession.[2]

Other arguments for the non-eternity of the world are related to the idea of infinity: (1) an infinite past cannot be traversed; (2) an infinite number of days in the past makes a total that cannot be actual; (3) if there is an actual infinite, addition can be made to it. All such arguments imply that there must be a first day in a world of infinite duration, and some way of moving from that day till now. In the hypothesis of an eternal world the past is not a composite whole, nor is there question of a point of departure.[3]

Père Sertillanges is of the opinion that St. Thomas hesitated all his life concerning the possibility of an actual infinity. He himself seems to have experienced a similar state of doubt. In his article on eternity written in 1897 he categorically denies the possibility of an actually infinite number.[4] In both St. Thomas d'Aquin[5] and its new final edition, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin[6] he maintains that Thomism does not admit of an infinite number of actually existing beings. However,

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 26-27.

[2] Ibid., p. 27.

[3] Ibid., p. 28.

[4] Sertillanges, "La preuve de l'existence . . . ," p. 615.

[5] A. D. Sertillanges, St. Thomas d'Aquin (Paris: Alcan, 1910), I, 229.

[6] Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 208.

in both Foundations of Thomistic Philosophy[1] and Le christianisme et les philosophie[2] he indicates that he is not certain that an actually infinite number is impossible. In La création et ses retentissements en philosophie, he does not state his position except to discount Aquinas' demonstration in the Summa theologica of the impossibility of an infinite multitude.[3] Père Sertillanges challenges the supposition that every number belongs to a finite species. Both Pascal and Leibniz are cited as believing that an infinite number constitutes a species of its own. While admitting that with abstract numbers infinity can only be successive, Sertillanges questions whether this succession holds for concrete reality. According to man's way of thinking, infinity is conceived as made up of successive unities. But in the concrete, infinity need not have the nature that we conceive by analysis and synthesis. The truth of the matter is that the human mind is troubled by infinity and gropes for certainty. Sertillanges' conclusion concerning actual infinity is hypothetical. If it is possible, God can create it.[4]

So-called scientific proofs for the beginning of the world were not a question in St. Thomas' day. Sertillanges does not hesitate to say that St. Thomas would have found them childish. Scientists have not been able to determine the magnitude of the universe. Consequently, they have no means of determining its duration. Against the principle of the

---

[1]Sertillanges, Foundations . . . , p. 112.

[2]Sertillanges, Le christianisme . . . , I, 266.

[3]S.T., I, 7, 4c.

[4]Sertillanges, L'idée de création . . . , pp. 35-36.

degradation of energy he argues that it is valid only for a finite closed system. In addition, a question may be raised as to whether the law of entropy is the only one universally operative in the universe. Can there not be a systole and a diastole regulated by a superior law that is presently unknown? In any case the question of the whole of creation, including as it does matter, spirit and causality in its ultimate laws, is not merely a cosmological problem. Metaphysics allows the possibility of an eternal world and so the question stands.[1]

Sertillanges closes his exposition concerning the duration of the universe with some considerations that have been important elements in his thinking and writing over a span of more than forty years. In his mind the thesis of an absolute beginning is more obscure than that of an eternal world. The supposition of an infinity preceding the present time is frightening, but it gives human thought some support. At least when one thinks back to past ages there is something there. In the thesis of an absolute beginning, if the precession of time by the eternity of God is excluded, there is no object for man's thought. There is no vacuum, which would be a definite capacity with dimensions. As for time there is a today without a yesterday, "a temporal frontier that is not a frontier, since there is a country only on one side, and there is no place from which to depart when one advances." The situation in this beginning cannot be called new because there is not another with which it can be compared. Neither God nor reality changes, God being immutable and

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 36-38.

reality not existing. Creation is not an operation nor is God La Fontaine's sovereign Fabricator. In thinking of a first day one faces "a series of menacing errors, or any inky blackness."[1]

So that unbelievers would not laugh at a faith in creation founded on bad reasoning, St. Thomas shows that a beginning of the world cannot be proved by reason. Sertillanges has another reason for defending the possibility of an eternal world. Aware that many apologists argue badly in their attempt to lead atheists to the admission of a first cause, he wants to free the theistic proofs from all debatable hypotheses. He contends that the proofs for the existence of God are independent of the eternity or non-eternity of the world, and that in the five ways there is no question of a beginning but only of actual dependence. The impossibility of infinite regression mentioned by St. Thomas is not related to duration but to actual dependence. The problem of the radical origin of the derived, finite, contingent being involves dependence on the first, infinite, necessary being at every instant, be it the first or any other.[2]

C. Creation

1. Nature

By an analysis of the category of action Sertillanges develops a metaphysical notion of creation. The elements of action are: (1) a subject possessing that which is to be communicated on his part; (2) matter to be used in the action; (3) an evolution of this matter

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 38-40. [2] Ibid., pp. 40-42.

toward the result ordained by the action; (4) the result or effect. There is a relation of agent to patient inasmuch as the agent is the principle of change in the patient. The patient is related to the agent, because of dependence on it for all that it receives. Of the four elements of action it is apparent that neither matter nor change are involved in creation. There remain only God and his effect. Since every real relation implies correlation and God cannot be related to anything, creation is a unilateral relation of dependence: the relation of creature to its creator.[1]

Human thought tends to conceive creation in a succeeding order implying God, his action and then the world. This thinking, which Sertillanges has previously exposed, is but the product of imagination placing an intermediary between God and his creature. In order that a creature be related to God, it must first of all exist. Thus creation as a relation follows upon the creature in the order of being. This means that the world as a dependent reality is first in intention and in nature, whereas its attribute of creation is necessarily posterior.[2]

A probing into the nature of creation prompts Sertillanges to declare that it is no exaggeration to call creation a mystery.

> Briefly, the idea of creation corresponds to the idea of a total, transcendent, non-temporal dependence of being with respect to its Source. This idea is defined by that of relation. But as for stating what kind of relation and pretending to conceive the link that attaches the derived to the Necessary, this is something wholly impossible. One knows an attachment only on the condition that he knows at the same times its two terms. Creation participates in the mystery of God, who, as we know, is a complete mystery. God is the necessary Unknowable; creation is in truth only a verbal and conceptual form of this necessity, and the knowledge

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 45-46. [2] Ibid., p. 47.

> we have of it, apart from its very affirmation is therefore negative. The world is, and the world would not be without God.[1]

Further investigation will reveal the pitfalls into which the complexities of creation may lead.

2. Possibility

One of the most challenging questions concerning creation is its very possibility. How can there be anything but self-subsistent being? In creation does God project something of his substance outside himself or should we say that God lodges the universe in some place within himself? Neither of these solutions is admissible. The former would make creation a kind of strict emanation, the latter would have God be a bodily being.[2]

In a certain sense the being of creatures flows from God, the fountain of being. To avoid conceiving this relation as a kind of transference or extraction of being that would make the creature consubstantial with God, we say that God made the world out of nothing. This statement, however, is a negative truth that emphasizes the absence of matter in the

---

[1] S. Thomas d'Aquin, Somme théologique, La création, p. 253.
"Bref l'idée de création correspond à l'idée d'une dépendance totale, mais transcendante et extratemporelle de l'être à l'égard de sa Source. Cette idée se définit par celle de relation. Mais quant à dire quelle, et à prétendre concevoir le lien qui rattache ainsi le dérivé au Nécessaire, c'est ce qui est du tout impossible. On ne connaît une attache qu'à la condition de connaître à la fois ses deux termes. La création participe au mystère de Dieu, qui est, nous le savons, un mystère plein. Dieu est l'Inconnaissable nécessaire; la création n'est au vrai qu'une forme verbale et conceptuelle de cette necessité et la connaissance, que nous en avons, en dehors de son affirmation même, est donc toute négative. Le monde est, et le monde ne serait pas sans Dieu."

[2] Sertillanges, L'idée de création . . . , pp. 49-50.

creating action. As such, it leaves the problem of ontological origin intact.[1]

One answer seems to remain. If God is, the world is not possible unless God and the world are one. Putting aside this pantheistic answer leaves the following antinomy. Universal reality is not God, nor is it borrowed nor taken from the being of God. Universal reality does not come from something other than God, nor does it come from nothingness. Confronted with this antinomy, Sertillanges answers, "I know what must not be said; I know a little what must be said; but I myself do not fully understand what I am saying."[2]

In speaking of God and reality, Sertillanges continues, it cannot be said that there are two beings, because God is really outside of being. Only analogically is being an atttibute of God. Hence, strictly speaking, it is not even correct to say God and man because of their radical difference in being. With regard to God's knowledge there is also an element which Sertillanges says must be accepted as a mystery or answered incorrectly. God's being is the whole of being, and therefore the whole of intelligibility. It would seem then that God can know only himself. In answer to these problems of being and knowledge, Sertillanges says that on this level our logic, product of experience with the relative, can only confuse. In the realm of the absolute, it cannot be sure that all communication supposes on the part of him who communicates a loss or

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.
"Je sais ce qu'il ne faut pas dire; je sais un peu ce qu'il faut dire; mais je ne pénètre pas moi-même ce que je dis."

an additional creation. One should not dare define a priori the law of communication of the source of being. Such an attempt would suggest that one could define God himself.[1]

As Sertillanges continues his search into the nature of creation the principal features of his thought concerning man's knowledge of God are expressed anew. He appeals again to the idea of mystery. Being a part of the world of participation, man's knowledge is in proportion to what he is and cannot go beyond the world of participation and reach the first source. To judge the possibility or impossibility of communication would be to transcend self. It is better, concludes Sertillanges, to live in the clarity of ignorance and to declare that "the first cause, explains everything in us and around us except the way that he gives us everything."[2] This lack of knowledge may seem more acceptable if one recalls that divine being and created being are not of the same order. Created being cannot be added to uncreated being. Divine being is better called super-being, since it belongs to none of the categories of being. Just as God cannot be defined so neither can the order of participation wherein the participated and the participant meet.[3]

3. Purpose

The purpose of creation presents further difficulties for the human mind. God, the sovereign good, suffices in himself. He has no motive for action and so questions arise as to why he acts and even whether action is possible. There is confusion because the criterion is

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

[2] Ibid., p. 53.

[3] Ibid.

human experience, in which an end or purpose represents usefulness, some kind of self enrichment. Since God cannot be enriched, it would seem that his purpose is to share his happiness as he shares his being. "God manifests himself in innumerable forms of existence as if to find himself in innumerable ways, but given through pure generosity without expecting a return unless it be to the advantage of creatures themselves."[1] This giving without return is even more incomprehensible because according to human modes of thinking God's goodness should increase through his communicating it. However, just as there is no addition to his being neither does his goodness, happiness nor glory change.

4. A certain relation-- relatio quaedam

The final challenge to man's understanding of creation, properly so-called, is the real relation of unilateral dependence--the nexus between the being of the world and God, total cause of the world. The mode of dependence is incomprehensible because it is beyond human experience. Ordinarily a being is and then it depends, but in creation a being depends in order to be, to such an extent that dependence and being are indistinguishable.[2]

Creation is called a relatio quaedam, a certain relation, by St. Thomas because it is a unique kind of relation. Affecting being as being creation cannot, strictly speaking, enter into any of the categories of being. Only by the exclusion of the other categories and by way of analogy can creation be considered as a relation. Finally it must be acknowledged that an attribute is not the object of a special

---

[1] Ibid., p. 55.

[2] Ibid., p. 56.

creation but is one with the subject it determines. Otherwise, there would be the problem of an infinite regress of relations in an effort to refer creation to its source.[1]

5. Characteristics

From the idea of creation just delineated, Sertillanges presents two essential characteristics that will have significant influence on all considerations pertaining to creation. From the fact that the creature as being is totally dependent it can be said that the creature is nothing by itself though not in itself. On the other hand, since creation is a pure unilateral relation as to the reality of things, this condition fixes the creature in a perfect existential and functional autonomy. God gives his creatures autonomy so that through God all things are as if God were not. God's all-powerful action posits in reality beings endowed with their own stability, their own spontaneity and for some the power to determine with him their own destiny.[2]

D. Conservation

The concept of conservation is another aspect of creation that Sertillanges attempts to purify by careful reflection. With St. Thomas,[3] he says that conservation and creation are one and the same thing distinct only with reference to a beginning. If there were no beginning, there would still be creation by God that would be a perpetual conservation.[4] Sertillanges declares that only by verbal concession can this perpetual

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

[2] Ibid., pp. 59-61.

[3] De potentia, III, art. 3, ad 6.

[4] S.C.G., III, 65.

conservation be called a permanent creation, since with regard to God it is eternal, and with regard to the creature it concerns being and the duration of being and so cannot be continued according to the instants of this duration.[1]

St. Thomas says that it is not necessary that as long as a creature is it should be created, because creation is a relation of the creature to the creator with a certain newness or beginning.[2] Sertillanges claims that there is purely a question of vocabulary involved in this distinction. In every day parlance we do not say that the universe is created but that it has been created. However, in reality through the relation of creation the universe depends upon God at every minute. All creatures depend at every instant on God both for being and duration, which is only an immanent measure of being. Strictly speaking, we should say that every being is created with every instant of its duration including the first if there be one. If a distinction is made between beings and their duration, it is legitimate, according to Sertillanges, to say that beings are created at the beginning of their duration. One can then speak only of the conservation of the being in question, provided that this conservation has all the characteristics of creation except a beginning.[3]

One further significant clarification must be made concerning conservation. Some have thought that because everything tends to the perfection of its being, it cannot cease to be except by a positive act

---

[1]Sertillanges, L'Idée de création . . . , pp. 65-67.

[2]S.T., I, 45, 3, ad 3.

[3]Sertillanges, L'idée de création . . . , pp. 67-68.

of God. This point of view, observes Sertillanges, over-emphasizes the autonomy of creatures. God can give being and autonomy to creatures, but he cannot allow them to do without him. God is the source of being; to be and to depend are in creatures one and the same thing.[1]

E. Creation and Some Philosophical Problems

Having treated of the idea of creation in itself, in its beginnings and in its permanence, Sertillanges proceeds to study the relationship of the idea of creation with the following topics: matter, efficient and final causality, cosmic and human evolution, providence, contingency and freedom, miracles, and evil. An extensive examination of each of these topics is beyond the scope of the present study. Only the more pertinent considerations of those topics that are closely related to the problem of God will be presented. In this way the characteristic trends of Sertillanges' thought concerning God will come to fuller light. Because Sertillanges has devoted two entire volumes to the problem of evil, this aspect will be considered in a separate chapter.

1. Matter

Discussing the duration of matter offers Sertillanges the occasion to stress the consequences of the unilateral relation that is creation. Inasmuch as creation is conceived as coextensive with a being that subsists, creation can be said to be of infinite duration. Strictly speaking, creation is not temporal, since it is a relation between created reality in all its forms including duration and the principle of all being. Certain thinkers, of whom Sertillanges cites Renouvier, conclude

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 68-71.

that in the Thomistic tradition there is a "permanent equation between the work done by creation and the being of the action that does it." As a result of this equation the traditional doctrine should be called a theological pantheism.[1]

Sertillanges agrees that if there is no difference between created being in its temporal development and the being of the permanent action that posits it, then everything is God. Gone is all autonomy of action and of being as well as any idea of freedom or real causality exercised by creatures. A conclusion such as this, Sertillanges contends, results from understanding creation as an action in time of the same nature as its effect. Comprehension of the doctrine of divine transcendence facilitates understanding the autonomy of creatures. They exist as if God were not and they neither join with nor add to the being or the eternity of their source.

> Created being, supposing that it exists, subsists of itself as if there were no God; for that which is, tends to be and not to disappear; but it must first of all be. It is through God. And that is not at all contradictory, because to subsist of self on the level of being and to subsist through God who causes being, are two notions, incommensurable with each other, separated by the abyss of divine mystery. God has the power to create autonomy and to posit it by his very action, which is a superaction transcendent to the being and action of a creature.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 89.

[2] Ibid., p. 90.

"L'être créé, à supposer qu'il soit, dure de lui-même comme s'il n'a avait pas de Dieu; car ce qui est, tend à être et non à disparaître; mais il faut tout d'abord qu'il soit. Il est de par Dieu. Et cela ne fait point de contradiction, parce que durer de soi-même au plan de l'être et durer de par Dieu qui cause l'être, sont deux notions incommensurables l'une à l'autre, séparées par l'abîme du mystère divin, Dieu ayant le pouvoir de créer les autonomies et de les poser par son action même, qui est une sur-action, transcendante a l'être et à l'action de la créature."

2. Efficient and final causality

The main point that Sertillanges makes in discussing creation and efficient causality is the compatibility of the activities of creator and creature. Philosophy, he says, can arrive at this conclusion even if it cannot understand it.

Creation is the source and determining principle of every activity in the world, since every creature participates in the divine activity as it participates in the divine being. As every being is from God, it acts only in virtue of God. However, action belongs to God and also to itself because of the autonomy that creation confers. The transcendence of the creating activity is such that it posits derived activities that, in virtue of their derivation, have actions that belong totally to themselves and totally to the first cause. This is so because the creator and the creature are of different orders and cannot be joined together nor added to each other.[1]

In his discussion of finality Sertillanges introduces the notion of ideality. Developing the thought of the creature participating in the being, activity and end of God, he declares that every creature emanating from God tends to imitate God in the form of the Idea that gave it birth and that in its reality is identical with God himself.[2] Be cause God is pure ideality and in creation gives of himself to creatures, immanent ideality will be found in creatures, too. In beings destined to evolve, this ideality will express itself in a system of means and ends.[3]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 92-96.

[2] Ibid., p. 97.

[3] Ibid., p. 99.

Finality is in all things, manifesting itself in different ways as ordained by the creator. It is impossible that God create beings without directing them toward their end and without inviting those endowed with reason to cooperate in achieving these ends, especially the principal one, self-realization. Immanent and transcendent finality are joined in the designs of God and in the proper end of beings in virtue of their creation. Finality is immanent because created beings are autonomous. It is transcendent because the being that finality affects is dependent on God in all things, including its tending toward its end.[1]

To create, to activate and to direct toward an end are all comprised in one non-temporal act of the source of being. In creating, God posits both beings and their inter-relations so that the natural end, the spiritual end and the cosmic or universal end are one in the plan of God.[2]

3. Providence

By the same act God creates universal being and its orientation; it is this ordination toward a destiny that is the work of providence. It is obvious then that creation and providence are two inseparable notions. An understanding of providence will shed further light on the notions of creation and the creator.

Providence, which direct all things toward their ends, presupposes universal knowledge. God knows all beings because he is the source of their being. Creation and providence meet in the eternal act that brings the creature and its entire duration—past, present, and future--into a unilateral relation of dependence on God. The notion of non-

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 100-104. [2] Ibid., p. 104.

temporal creation leads to a knowledge of divine prevision and its modality.[1]

A second condition for the functioning of providence is a will to which all things are subject. The will of God is the law of all things because God in creating gives together with being its dynamism and its direction. "The universality of the creating action involves the universality of the divine causality with regard to all that is done in the world as well as with regard to all that is."[2]

Providence is defined as divine reason which, situated at the supreme summit, disposes of all things. It is not simply prevision nor is it government but a plan in which all events are foreordained as well as foreknown. Creation makes clear the notion of providence, arrangement in view of an end, because creation or divine participation intervenes under the form of intelligibility, of communication of being, and of ordering toward an ultimate end.[3]

Errors concerning providence spring from ignorance of God as first being, source of all being, on whom every being depends. A true notion of God the creator allows for a providence whose action is universal, infallible, and transcendent. Here mystery is again involved because providential action respects the autonomy of creatures in such wise that, though subject to providence, they act necessarily or freely as if God did not exist. Not only does providence respect the autonomy of created beings but it works through this autonomy. God communicates not only being but also causality, so that his creatures act autonomously

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 161-163. [2] Ibid., p. 165.

[3] Ibid., pp. 166-167.

as efficient causes. Providence acts through creatures and its interventions are manifestations of natural spontaneity or free autonomy.[1]

Sertillanges suggests that the idea of providence has certain priority over that of creation. It can be said that for a particular being God is provident before being creator, since it is in view of his providence that he creates it.

> To believe in providence is to say to oneself that God is there behind every object; that every being is an emanation of his being, every law a participation of his spirit, every deed a manifestation of his will, all space his domain, all duration an imitation of his life. . .[2]

4. Contingency and freedom

Chance and free will seem to be in direct opposition to providence. It is again a matter of recognizing that creation gives being together with all its relations--necessary and contingent. The creator endows both being and its relations with autonomy. Because God creates it, the contingent exists necessarily, but it exists as contingent because the creator has so made it. The transcendence of the creating action renders possible the coexistence of divine necessity and of contingency. "He who is above all and who causes all can obstruct nothing and above all not that which he creates."[3]

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 167-169

[2] Ibid., p. 174.
"Croire à la providence, c'est se dire que Dieu est là en arrière de chaque objet, que tout être est une émanation de son être, toute loi une participation de son esprit, tout fait, une manifestation de sa volonté, tout espace son domaine, toute durée une imitation de sa vie. . . . "

[3] Ibid., p. 181.

Chance is a happening that comes about by the meeting of causal series that are ordered in themselves but are not coordinated. It must be admitted that some happenings that have been attributed to chance are the results of statistical laws hitherto unknown. Nevertheless, experience and the hylomorphic theory do not allow acceptance of the generalization that chance is a word that signifies ignorance. Matter is by nature indeterminate and so there will always be an element of indetermination. Causal interferences that express no natural tendencies will always exist. Sertillanges maintains that it is a serious philosophical error to hold that the real is entirely composed of intelligible elements that can be known thoroughly through intellectual analysis. Although the indetermination of matter is penetrated by the divine mind, real indetermination that is subject to no created law remains. Chance is an element foreseen and foreordained by the creator, determining that the undetermined exist.[1]

In attacks on human liberty as well as in defense of it, Sertillanges discovers a misunderstanding of divine transcendence. The proponents of physical premotion can easily lose sight of the fact that it is impossible to qualify the actions of God. God is not related to creatures; creatures are related to him. Sertillanges sees in the term physical premotion a triple verbal heresy.[2] The problem area is not in the realm of the physical but rather in the realm of the ontological. The motion attributed to God can be only creation, a relation of dependence, not an action. Finally there can be no premotion since this notion

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 177-181.

[2] Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 238.

is temporal, wholly opposed to the eternal causality of God.[1]

In those systems that impair the action of God in man's exercise of his free will there is an inadequate notion of creation, according to Sertillanges. It is not in an analysis of the human will that God is to be found but in the comprehension of creation as the giving of being with all its attributes. For this reason it is inaccurate to state that God gives man liberty and man uses it. To be a man, to be a free man, to be a man using freedom are all forms of being. To withdraw from the source of being the free act is to make of God a partial cause that depends to some extent on his effects. From another perspective it can be said that the free act representing man's being in its highest state of existence, has greater need of creation than any other reality in the world. Without divine causality the free act would not exist, and man would not be free.[2] The marked tendency that Sertillanges has shown to expose anthropomorphic expressions in the account of creation is evident also in his discussion of free will.

5. Miracles

A miracle, according to the generally accepted interpretation, is a happening that occurs under the direct influence of the first cause through a special intervention rather than through the mediation of created agents functioning according to their own laws. Sertillanges seeks to rid the miracle of traces of anthropomorphic thinking by associating it with the idea of creation. As far as that which is essential to

---

[1]Sertillanges, L'idée de création . . . , pp. 184-185.

[2]Ibid., pp. 185-186.

creation is concerned, Sertillanges affirms, even at the risk of shocking some, that there are no miracles. Every being and every event depends on God in the same way. The word miracle obtains only among creatures and their natural connections or lack of them. In the case of a miracle there is pure succession without any relationship between antecedent and consequent. On the level of creation both beings and their relationships flow from God, and there is no need to distinguish between those that are related to antecedents and those that are not. Everything is in relation only to God.[1]

It is of the nature of creation to give both beings and their relationships and to depend on neither of these in any way. God is fully the cause of a consequent as if there were no antecedent. Universal causality and God's transcendence are such that while a secondary cause really produces its effect, divine action falls on this effect as directly and independently as if the secondary cause did not exist. Sertillanges suggests that instead of speaking of divine action in a miracle we should simply speak of the relation of created autonomy to the transcendent source. By restricting our considerations to ontological dependence or participation, which is the correct metaphysical description of creation, we would achieve greater clarity.[2]

To think of miracles in terms of divine action in time is a further source of anthropomorphic error. If God entered into time to bring about a miracle, it would be correct to consider him as an agent enveloped in time--no longer transcendent, no longer creator. This

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 193-196. [2] Ibid., pp. 197-202.

erroneous concept of God is drawn from one of his effects in time. From the point of view of the creature a miracle is a new effect in time without causal relationship to a created antecedent, but the radical and universal causality of God is outside of time. With regard to the laws of nature a miracle is an unusual event; as for the creator, a miracle is nothing but a creature in a unilateral relation of total dependence exactly like any other being.[1]

F. Conclusion

Approaching the notion of creation from a purely metaphysical point of view offers Sertillanges the occasion of clarifying and emphasizing many concepts that are closely related to a refined philosophical understanding of God and his ways. Sertillanges' concern with divorcing the idea of creation from the problem of a beginning has a two-fold impact. It shows first of all that the Thomistic proofs for the existence of God are independent of any question of infinite regress in time. On the other hand, his discussion of an eternal world serves to clarify the action of God's eternity as opposed to the notion of the infinite duration of creatures. His exposition of the difficulties of the conception of the beginning of the world also emphasizes the complexity and the obscurity of the idea of creation.

Through his analysis of the ordinary notion of creation Sertillanges strips it of anthropomorphic notions concerning God, time, and nothingness. His metaphysical analysis of the category of action

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 198-199.

shows clearly the nature of creation--a unilateral relation of total dependence. He does not hesitate to go further and show the problems involved in the notion of creation. Man knows what must be said and what must not be said concerning creation, but he is ultimately faced with mystery. To understand the way creatures participate in God would be to know God's nature, to be able to define God.

Sertillanges places special emphasis on the idea of the unilateral relation of the creature to its creator. He also brings frequently to the fore the compatibility of the being and action of creator and creatures. Noticeable also is a strong tendency to insist on the element of mystery. Particularly pertinent to our investigation is the thought that the impossibility of fully penetrating the mystery of creation is linked with the unknowability of one of its terms--God.

CHAPTER V

GOD AND EVIL

Floods, fire, famine, wars, disease, murder, injustice, death--in the face of these and other tragedies the learned and the unlearned of all times have raised questions. They have wondered about their personal destiny, about the future of the human race, about the meaning of the universe. Above all they have speculated concerning the wisdom, omnipotence, providence and goodness of a God who, to all appearances, is the cause of these evils. Any approach to the problem of evil presupposes or implies a doctrine concerning the existence and nature of God.

Toward the end of his long career Sertillanges undertook an extensive study of the problem of evil. As a result of his protracted research for the two volume study Le christianisme et les philosophies he observed the influence that this problem exercises in determining the general orientation of any philosophy. He believed too that the problem of evil haunted the modern conscience to the point of being a sickness of the mind. Seeing the need for a contemporary study of the question of evil, Père Sertillanges wrote two volumes on this problem. The first volume Le problème du mal--l'histoire, is devoted to vast historical survey tracing man's thought concerning evil from primitive times to contemporary existentialism. The second, Le problème du mal--la solution, is a metaphysical study of evil. Although the first volume is a signifi-

cant contribution to an appreciation of man's efforts to solve the problem of evil, we will limit our investigation to Sertillanges' metaphysical considerations in the second volume as well as in his other philosophical works that treat briefly of evil. Sertillanges has written no published articles on this topic. Our study will be directed toward discovering the relation between Sertillanges' thoughts on evil and his approach to God.

The topics treated in his metaphysical study of the problem of evil are: the definition of evil, its origin, replies to objections and evil in nature. Père Sertillanges had planned four more chapters including evil in life, in history, in the City of God and finally the mystery of evil. Sudden death in his eighty-fifth year interrupted the completion of his work. However, according to his last letters, he felt that the greater part of his work had been achieved, since the final four chapters were to be corollaries to the metaphysical considerations he had already completed. We are thus assured that the second volume embraces his principal ideas concerning evil.

A. The Nature of Evil

In developing a definition of evil Sertillanges begins by showing that neither the scientist, nor the metaphysician, nor the theologian can accept the idea that any natural reality is an evil. The scientist will see admirable organization and prodigies of the creating activity. In any being the metaphysician will not admit a bad nature because it could neither act nor be acted upon except in view of a good end. The theologian cannot affirm a bad existence without admitting that evil emanates

from God.[1]

It must be stressed, Sertillanges feels, that to deny that evil is a positive reality is not to deny that there is evil. Evil is a privation, not a simple diminution of good, nor a simple negation, nor limitation. The equivocity of the term metaphysical evil has added to the confusion of thinkers who are repulsed by the thesis of the non-positivity of evil. By metaphysical evil is meant the limitation that characterizes all creatures. Although the limitation of creatures is at the origin of evil, it is not an evil in itself.[2]

Having established that evil is not a being nor a lesser degree of being, Sertillanges shows how evil as privation seems to be a real being. In a certain sense evil is positive since it posits either a violation of nature or an offense against the moral order. In the same way, it may be said that evil acts not through itself but through the good it changes and whose action it hinders. St. Thomas explains that in affirming that evil is, the verb to be does not signify existence but is simply the logical bond of a true proposition. The content of the proposition remains a pure privation. Evil as such is never encountered but only someone or something in which there is evil. A subject in which there is evil is good and so St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, can say evil is a certain good and there can be no evil unless there is something good. From the fact that evil has good as its subject it follows that evil can never completely exhaust the good without annihilating itself.[3]

---

[1] A. D. Sertillanges, Le problème du mal--la solution (Paris: Aubier, 1951), pp. 5-6.

[2] Ibid., pp. 6-8.

[3] Ibid., pp. 8-10.

Sertillanges attempts to answer difficulties with regard to the conception of evil as privation. Prime matter would seem to be sovereign evil, being undetermined, apt for all forms yet having none. This objection may hold in the abstract, but according to reality matter is the element that allows for exchange furnishing for "universal activity its territory of action." With Aristotle and the schoolmen Sertillanges concludes that, as a constitutive principle of substance, matter participates in the good of substance and its capacity for further forms makes it already a participant of future good.[1]

Confronted with the fact of suffering it seems ridiculous to say that evil is a simple privation. Suffering, Sertillanges explains, is the painful feeling that one has as a result of being hurt. It refers directly to the painful feeling and only indirectly to the cause of this feeling. As a painful feeling it is an evil of a sort, since it interrupts the well-being of the organism, but it is an element of defense of the organism's integrity. Suffering in the face of a moral evil such as betrayal, dishonor or the death of a dear one is the price of being sensitive to all that is good. To consider suffering as proof of the positive existence of evil is to ignore its useful function as a warning and as an expression of sensitivity. The severe pain of sickness results from failure of some sort with regard to the warnings given by suffering.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 12

[2] Ibid., pp. 13-16.

B. The Origin of Evil

In discovering the origin of evil, Sertillanges first exposes the errors of pessimism and dualism. The absolute pessimist sees evil as the fundamental fact in being itself, all other aspects having only a negative and transitory character. Sertillanges answers that the subsistence and progress of the universe and of civilization give lie to the assertion that evil predominates. If evil is defined as privation, then the dualistic tenet of a first cause of evil is impossible. Evil is a lack of participation in the first good; it cannot participate in a so-called first evil which would be supreme nothingness. The non-being of privation cannot have a first cause although there must be a reason for this absence of being. The greatest errors as well as the greatest truths have their source in the proper definition of evil.[1]

Père Sertillanges rejects original sin as an explanation of the radical origin of universal evil. Original sin is only a particular instance of evil belonging to the historical order. Evil has its roots in the constitution of the real at the very source of being. Sertillanges maintains that even if there were no original sin, humans could not avoid all evil, man and the universe being as complex as they are. The most that can be supposed is that man would be spared the great risks and sorrows that are now his. Sertillanges contends that if suffering and death were so abnormal and unjustifiable today they would not exist, since the redemption has destroyed the reign of original sin. Not only in the sin of Adam must the explanation of human evil be sought but also

---

[1] Ibid., II, 19-22.

in the creative action itself where the forms of being find their first origin and their ultimate explanation.[1]

The studying of creation leads Sertillanges to the root of evil. God created in order to express and communicate his goodness, manifesting by a wise variety of interrelated beings the infinite riches of his power, wisdom, justice and providence. All existing things participate in God to a greater or lesser degree and are necessarily limited, thus imperfect. There is no evil in being only what one is but in not being entirely what one is supposed to be, integrally constituted in one's nature. There is always a possibility of the interruption of harmonious continuity in a limited being. Created being itself, considered from the aspect of its essential imperfection, can be called the root of evil. In a certain sense then God can be called the principle of evil both because the world which he creates is in God before being in itself and because he wants the world as it is although he wills only the good.[2] "Because of his sovereign transcendence the Super-Being dominates all the differences of being even the most profound."[3] Good and evil are under this dominion; thus evil occasions good, and good turns evil to its own end so that through both the divine plan is realized.[4]

Sertillanges is of the opinion that the desire for a world without evil is empty imagination.[5] All exchange, all inequality would have to be removed. In nature how can the struggle for life be eliminated?

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 25-32.

[2] Ibid., p. 38.

[3] Ibid., p. 49.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Sertillanges, L'idée de création ... , p. 219.

Among humans suffering and vice are often the occasion of triumph and conquest in the moral order. "Evil is evil; but that there be a possibility of evil is a good."[1] Everything depends on the totality of creation and on the final outcome.

> The purpose of creation, in all that, is order, it is the richest possible unfolding of the virtualities of life and of the almost infinite resources that the initial constitution of the world conceals, a likeness itself of the absolute infinity of God who seeks to reveal himself there.[2]

Père Sertillanges suggests that since we know so little of this universe--its beginnings, its ends, its laws, its reciprocal conditionings--it is presumptuous to make plans for another one.[3]

C. Some Objections

To refute the principal objections to the traditional position concerning evil, Sertillanges chooses as his opponent Pierre Bayle, who is typical of those who attack theistic beliefs by utilizing the theme of evil in the world. Frequently in this dispute with Bayle, Père Sertillanges has recourse to theological reflections. Since these considerations are beyond our present interest, we will remain as much as possible within the philosophical perspectives of the discussion.

If God intended the happiness of his creatures he so disposed

---

[1] Ibid., p. 220

[2] Ibid., p. 223.
"Le but de la création en tout cela, c'est l'ordre, c'est le déploiement le plus riche possible des virtualités de la vie et des ressources quasi infinies que recèle la constitution initiale du monde, image elle-même de l'infinité absolue de Dieu qui cherche à s'y manifester.

[3] Sertillanges, Le problème du mal, II, pp. 45-46.

things as to satisfy only a small number and at a terrible price. Such, according to Sertillanges, is the formulation of Bayle's main argument. Sertillanges grants that in Bayle's time the small number of the elect was stressed and that there was very little understanding of the overall plan of creation. However, the main error in Pierre Bayle's argument is his limited point of view. He compares God to an administrator, the head of a family, a king, or a farmer. These analogies are legitimate, continues Sertillanges, but a radical correction must be made because the transcendence of God is such that neither his person, nor his action falls into human categories.[1] There is an almost infinite disproportion between the considerations that enter into Bayle's analogies and the reasons for God's designs. The outlook of a king, a father, or a guardian is easily divined but the exigencies of a universal order, natural and supernatural, escape us.[2]

Sertillanges further explicates the notion of analogy in answer to Stuart Mill's remark, "If the goodness of God is not what we call goodness, I renounce understanding anything." God's goodness is analogous to ours; otherwise we would not know it, since we arrive at a knowledge of the creator's goodness from that of the creature's. However, Sertillanges warns, because the goodness of God, identical with all his other attributes, disappears into the incomprehensibility of the divine being, we must not enclose the divine attributes and their application within our narrow limits, thus conceiving a false god.

The paternal God of Bayle, Sertillanges continues, would be

---

[1] Ibid., II, 54.

[2] Ibid., II, 55-56.

finite and in continuous contact with evil, which is inseparable from the limited. God is wholly removed from evil because he is totally outside of being as its pure source.[1] Consequently, God is incompresensible and it is not possible to impose upon him temporal norms of action without radically correcting them. So that we may recognize God's grandeur "it is good that there is between God and us, between the comportment of God and human comportment, all the depth of the mystery of the world, which extends itself into the mystery of God."[2]

Bayle also argues that it is implied in explanations of God's plan that only one way was open to him, one full of painful results. God is all powerful, Bayle continues, and so every possibility is his. All powerful or not, Père Sertillanges replies, an agent is limited by the ends he proposes. Sertillanges cites Bergson as denouncing this sophism by showing that omnipotence does not consist in doing that which is contradictory, that one of the terms of the contradiction can be imposed by the ends. It becomes evident that either the ends of creation cannot be realized or there must be conditions in which evil has a place.[3]

Père Sertillanges declares that Bayle and his followers reason badly concerning God's prevision or foreknowledge. They hold that because of his foreknowledge God should not have posited any act from which a bad effect would follow. But God's foreknowledge does not change fundamental relations; whatever is just in itself is not changed because of divine prevision, better called eternal vision. Human foreknowledge

---

[1] Ibid., II, 56.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., II, 56-57.

changes the relationship of created beings, but the relation between a human event and divine foreknowledge is transcendental. It is not a reciprocal relation; the relations of the created with the uncreated, of the finite with the infinite are incommensurable and consequently unknowable. To compare the foreknowledge of God with that of a father or the head of a battalion is out of the question. It should also be recalled that just as God has given autonomy of being he has given autonomy of relations and should not be called upon to disrupt them.[1]

Original sin and salvation are also favorite targets of Bayle, continues Sertillanges. Why is God forced to change his plans, close the Garden of Eden and intervene in person? In part, Sertillanges says, this objection originates from ignorance of the relationship of eternity and time; there is no before and after in God's plan. He does not need to recapture his creation, since it is totally present to him in one eternal act. The image of a creator surprised by disaster or of a builder constructing a house destined for ruin falls before the concept of a unique creative work in two temporal phases. As for the objection that the great majority of the human race will not be saved, Sertillanges dismisses it as mere opinion derived from moral exhortation, not dogma. In addition, Sertillanges asks whether we can be certain that all the elect are to come only from this small planet. The grandeur of the divine plan is such that we cannot hope to grasp the whole of it and thus have an idea of the role that evil, its effects and its redress will play.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., II, 57-58.

[2] Ibid., II, 58-64.

Sertillanges gives answer to the problems of predestination and hell by approaching them in terms of freedom. Man is free and consequently responsible for his choices. It is ridiculous to suggest that God consult his creatures before creating them. Further, to expect freedom and at the same time no possibility of unhappiness is to misunderstand again the unconditioned omnipotence of God. Absolutely speaking his omnipotence is unconditioned but not in regard to ends that in his wisdom he chooses to pursue. God manifests and shares the infinite riches of his being by establishing a hierarchy of values whose relative autonomy he respects. One of the most eminent of these values is freedom.[1]

The supreme freedom of God and of the elect should be enjoyed by all. So runs another objection that Sertillanges considers worthy of rebuttal. The freedom of the elect is more perfect because it is more enlightened and is not subject to risk. However, since this freedom is not natural to the elect, as it is to God, it is less glorious if received passively rather than earned. To wish that there be no risk in freedom is to ask that there be uniformity and security, an impoverishment of the moral or der similar to that of a physical universe in which diversity of species was suppressed. The physical universe and the moral universe are justified by a superior finality and by a harmony of values that reason recognizes as a good.[2]

The final source of confusion and objection that Sertillanges considers is the reconciliation of God's action with sin. He proposes two truths that must be maintained even though they appear to be con-

---

[1] Ibid., II, 64-66.

[2] Ibid., II, 69-72.

tradictory. The first is that God causes all being and, consequently, sin in all its positive aspects. Sertillanges adds that those who seek to mitigate the universal causality of God in this respect fall into greater difficulties than they solve. The second truth is that God cannot cause sin. Every being is good and so is its every natural tendency. The first cause creates second causes capable of erring; he does not create them erring.[1]

Père Sertillanges explains the distinction of God's ordaining and permissive will against Bayle's specious argument that God wants the sinner to disobey him as part of his divine plan but he wants the sinner to believe that God wants him to obey. Sertillanges answers that the sinner does what God does not will but in such a way that through the sinner's very sin God does what he wants. Fully respecting the autonomy of the creature's deviating will God collaborates with the sinner in all that is positive in the act of sinning but not in the sin itself. The mystery of divine transcendence is such that whatever man does freely against the divine will, God does freely for his own ends, while leaving man accountable for that which vitiates the act. The divine and human wills are not compounded in this instance, and just as there is no addition when they are in agreement, there is no contradiction when they are opposed.[2]

The last chapter that Sertillanges was able to complete is concerned with evil in nature. He considers it as an application in detail of the principles he has previously discussed. As such it has nothing

---

[1] Ibid., II, 75-76. [2] Ibid., II, 78-79.

further to add to our investigation

D. Mystery

From the outset of his two volumes on evil, Sertillanges had planned a final chapter that was to be entitled "The Mystery." He had prepared for the last chapter some notes that the editors use to conclude his work. Sertillanges declares that he has done everything possible to remove the scandal of evil but the mystery remains. Giving a decisive solution to the problem of evil would require an impossible condition--a comprehensive knowledge of the relationship of the relative with the absolute, of human thought with divine thought, of the finite with the infinite. Creation cannot be fathomed and understood because one of the terms is infinite. Real union implies entire presence of both terms, but in this instance an infinity separates the two terms, one of which is the infinite in person.[1]

The whole problem of evil would be unraveled by defining participation, but to do so would require a definition of God, who is for man "an abyss of light, an abyss of dazzlement, an abyss of night." To define the relationship of creator and creature, recourse must be had either to symbols or to analogies that are partially valid. Sertillanges explains that he has pursued this course, while at the same time he has rejected less valid analogies as forced. Yet, he declares, we cannot reach the root of things.[2]

In the reconciliation of the good that is God with the good of

---

[1] Ibid., II, 137.

[2] Ibid., II, 138.

creation and with the good of each creature, Sertillanges finds the whole problem of creation, of the divine ends of creation, of the ordaining and permissive will of providence and the meeting of good and evil under the notion of divine governance. It is evident, Sertillanges asserts, that this reconciliation is an impenetrable mystery that begins with participated being, continues with shared activities and concludes with proposed and achieved ends.

Sertillanges continues by proposing a series of questions.

> How do we exist, when God has all being?
> How do we act freely when God does everything?
> How can we tend toward the very goods that are proper to us when the impulsion that created us tends and can only tend toward the infinity of good.
> How . . . finally in the result can there be harmony between the evil that subsists and the satisfaction of the divine will tending toward the perfect?[1]

Sertillanges declares that in recognizing mystery he is not renouncing reason, rather he refuses to renounce certitude because of ignorance or doubt. It can be demonstrated that God is infinitely powerful, wise, and good. Consequently Sertillanges will not renounce this knowledge because of troubling evidence related to the small part of the divine plan open to men.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., II, 138-139.
"Comment sommes-nous alors que Dieu a tout l'être?
Comment agissons-nous alors que Dieu fait tout?
Comment pouvons-nous tendre aux mêmes biens qui nous sont propres alors que l'impulsion qui nous crée tend et ne peut tendre qu'à l'infini du bien?
Comment ... enfin dans le résultat y a-t-il harmonie entre le mal qui subsiste et la satisfaction du divin vouloir tendant au parfait?"

[2] Ibid., II, 139.

Solving the problem of evil in a good, wise creation, says Père Sertillanges requires an integral knowledge of the order of good. This order can be known in its source and its total participation. In its source good is God himself, who can only be known by direct intuition, impossible to the natural powers of man. Participated good in its entirety, being subject to time, cannot be known until the complete unfolding of time, which will bring with it a full knowledge of means and ends. In the meantime Sertillanges suggests for both objectors and overconfident apologists the following argument from the book of Job (11:7) "Will you find the nature of God? Will you penetrate the depths of the Omnipotent?"[1]

Sertillanges explains that when he says that the ultimate solution of the problem of evil is a mystery he does not mean that it escapes the real and vanishes. On the contrary, mystery rejoins full Being whose communications have a common root that is inaccessible to human thought like that being itself. To know the source and the destiny of created being would be to know the whole creative plan including the creator. This plenitude, concludes Sertillanges, is the beatific vision, expressed negatively as mystery.

E. Conclusion

A study of Sertillanges' thoughts on evil reveals that his basic doctrine is not new, being merely a development of St. Thomas' treatment of the same subject. He has significantly highlighted certain points

---

[1] Ibid., II, 140.

that are of interest to the modern mind. The so-called metaphysical evil of Leibniz is one such question. While admitting that the limitation of creatures is at the origin of evil, Sertillanges denies that it is an evil in itself. In reviewing the ever-recurring objections concerning omnipotence, omniscience, predestination and free will, Sertillanges exposes the distortions that result from anthropomorphic thinking.

In his concluding notes Père Sertillanges asserts that the problem of evil cannot be fully resolved now because it is so closely associated with the nature of God's being and action. The ultimate solution of the problem of evil can only be found in God. Evil remains a mystery for man in this life.

CHAPTER VI

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Anthropomorphism or agnosticism--these are the two extremes that must be avoided in any enquiry into the nature of God. An anthropomorphic answer to the question what is God will make of God a superman. The more sophisticated but equally unsatisfactory response of the agnostic will render God unknowable. There are elements of truth in each position. It is the task of the philosopher to extract and synthesize what is true in these opposing theses in order to further man's understanding of the nature of God.

A Summary

Rather than fall into anthropomorphism, Père Sertillanges proposes a severe doctrine concerning man's knowledge of God. His interpretation strongly emphasizes the incomprehensibility of God. He maintains that the whole of theodicy is one long proof of the existence of God. The work of the philosopher in natural theology is to establish by deduction all the conclusions that can be drawn concerning the source of being. The nature of God is in itself inaccessible. Man can attain only a partial understanding of creation, of evil, of providence, of free will because the total answer to each of these questions is intimately associated with the mystery of the nature of God.

> Whoever has frequented the summits of Thomistic thought knows well that the highest metaphysical questions: that of evil, of creation, of divine motion and of providence . . . are placed by the angelic Doctore under the aegis of this affirmation: God is above being: extra totum ordinem entium existens. (In Perihermeneias, lect. 14, no 22.)[1]

Sertillanges concedes that being as applied to God is superior to other names, since it does not express any essence and is indeterminate. However, he continues, its superiority is only relative because in the concrete it expresses a subject that we conceive as distinct from the existence it receives and in the abstract it expresses a quality or general essence. Thus, strictly speaking, being cannot be predicated of the first being, which is outside of participation in being. For this reason God is the object of no science, not even of metaphysics. God enters into metaphysical speculation only as the ineffable and unnameable principle of being.[2] Being is attributed to God uniquely and exclusively because he is its principle. God is not in being, being is in God. The proposition "God is" is a judgment of existence, not of nature, and posits God as above being, the super being.[3]

---

[1]Sertillanges, Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme, p. 29.
"Qui a frequenté les sommets de la pensée thomiste sait à merveille que les plus hautes questions métaphysiques: celle du mal, celle de la création, celle de la motion divine et de la providence ... sont placées par le docteur angélique sous l'égide de cette affirmation: Dieu est au-dessus de l'être: extra totum ordinem entium existens."

[2]Sertillanges, La philosophie ... , I, 166.

[3]A. D. Sertillanges, "La connaissance de Dieu," Revue de philosophie, IX (1906), 618.

Père Sertillanges maintains that the Thomistic doctrine of analogy is the middle path between absolute agnosticism and anthropomorphism. However, he greatly restricts its value. Indirect analogy, which is required in this instance, is founded on a likeness not between two things but between proportions relative to them. In naming God we do not say that there is any sort of definite relation between God and a creature or a mode of existence really common to both but that there is a similitude between the relation of God to God and creature to creature. God is to God, from the point of view of the plenitude of his being, what man is to his intelligence, goodness and other qualities as long as no imperfection is implied.[1] But, says Sertillanges, the divine proportion presents this difficulty. God is infinite and all that is in God is God and thus infinite. The analogy of proportionality would be that man is to his intelligence as infinity is to infinity. This proportion represents nothing by itself and provides further proof that a definition of anything that we can say of God has no value.[2]

While we acknowledge that in God there is only God, Sertillanges admits that we may say that God is intelligent, good, powerful and the like. But all these expressions are lame and equivocal because they do not mean the same manner of existing when predicated of God and man. However, they are not purely equivocal, since they are true when viewed from one particular aspect, though considered otherwise they may be

---

[1] Sertillanges, Foundations . . . , pp. 80-81.

[2] Sertillanges, Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme, pp. 52-53.

false. Creatures demand God in the name of all the perfections they contain, and we cannot alienate from God any perfection that is found in creatures. No perfection can be denied to the first cause; every perfection found in creatures must be affirmed of God. All this tells nothing about God considered intimately in himself. Consequently, Sertillanges declares, "We can do little more than give an answer to the question: Is there a God?"[1]

According to Sertillanges, St. Thomas' theory does not seek to justify the divine names by analogy of resemblance between God and creatures in the sense that there is really something common to both. There is nothing in common, not even being. The names that we use in speaking of God apply to him inasmuch as he is the cause of the things from which we form our concepts and must be accorded a formal supereminence that explains these effects. Thus, the analogy is indirect and affords no element of definition.[2]

For Sertillanges God is, strictly speaking, an unknowable, for to know is to define. To be united to God through the intellect is to be united to an unknown. It is a question here, not of simple agnosticism, but of an agnosticism of definition. From the point of view of definition there is absolute agnosticism, for God cannot be defined if no element of definition can really be common to God and to creatures.[3]

---

[1] Sertillanges, Foundations..., p. 81.

[2] Sertillanges, Le christianisme ..., I, 272.

[3] Ibid., I, 270.

Père Sertillanges points out that St. Thomas does not hesitate to write that qualities like goodness, wisdom, and power are not in God. The multiplicity and definite character of these attributes arise from creatures; they are not in God.[1] God is a nameless synthesis of perfection having no distinct attributes, no definite characteristics, no essence. No attribute belongs formally to God unless we add the term "eminently" to signify that it is present in an infinite way, dissolved as it were in the super-being and surpassing any name that can be uttered.[2]

In order to express the divine mode of being recourse must be had to negation. We say that God is eternal to indicate that He is not in time or that he is infinite to indicate that he is not in space. In our efforts to give expression to what God is we also have recourse to the relations of creatures to God. To signify in what manner He is good, intelligent, cause or being we say that God is sovereign good, the first intelligence, the supreme cause, the first being. He is good, intelligent, cause, being in the way suitable for that which is the source of all goodness, all intelligence, all cause, all being. Once more Sertillanges points out that we have not gone beyond the question whether God is. All the terms used to define him have only a negative or relative value and do not reveal what God is.[3]

Sertillanges explains that when we call God cause, which is our

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Sertillanges, Foundations . . . , p. 80.

[3] Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 167.

way of reaching and naming him, it is not to place him in the category of cause. God is super-cause, super-good, super-being. These genera are terminated by a transcendent that is their source. This source is not related to the genera; they are related to it. Thus, God is cause uniquely in the sense that the universe has no meaning without him. Cause when predicated of God does not pretend to define but implies the postulate of universal indigence, and so we call God cause and source inasmuch as we recognize that the universe is dependent. Our affirmations do not qualify him in his relation to us. More precisely, since God is not really related to any created thing, our affirmations qualify him by reason of our relation to him.[1]

> The problem of God brings us precisely to this: to comprehend the necessity of the Incomprehensible; to postulate through intelligence the Unintelligible; to know there is an Unknowable; to explain by mystery that which without mystery would be absurdity and consequently non-being and which however is. Without God the world constituted by the relations of contingent and conditioned beings could be defined as a <u>system of non-beings</u>.[2]

B. Evaluation

To evaluate accurately the significance of Sertillanges' approach to God one should lose sight neither of Sertillanges' purpose in writing

---

[1] <u>Ibid</u>., I, 173-174.

[2] <u>Ibid</u>., I, 150.
"Le problème de Dieu nous accule précisément à ceci: comprendre la nécessité de l'Incompréhensible; postuler par l'intelligence l'Inintelligible; connaître qu'il y a un Inconnaissable; expliquer par le mystère ce qui sans le mystère serait l'absurde, par consequent le non-être, et qui cependant est. Sans Dieu, le monde, constitué par les relations d'être tous conditionnés, pourrait se définir <u>un système de riens</u>.

nor of the whole of his philosophical thought concerning the problem of God. To single out some of his statements without relation to the whole of his teaching is to risk failing to grasp the full import of his efforts.

1. Purpose

Two central preoccupations of Sertillanges are "fidelity to St. Thomas and passionate concern with the issues troubling contemporary man."[1] In the early twentieth century he saw the extreme intellectualism of a misunderstood scholasticism leading to both anthropomorphism and, by way of reaction, to agnosticism. One of his own scholastic contemporaries complains in the following words.

> The dialectical self assurance of certain scholastics is frightening, like the skill of jugglers, who toss up into the air precious and fragile works of art whose value they do not know. It is only the true philosopher and the true theologian who inspire confidence because one feels that across all their reasoning processes the eye of their mind is always turned toward the inaccessible heights of the divine being.[2]

Given the reaction to rationalism that was to come to full bloom in existentialism, Sertillanges meets the need of the time by emphasizing the negative and transcendent element in St. Thomas' teaching about God.

Josef Pieper observes that the negative element is not prominent

---

[1] James Collins, "Le problème du mal," (Review), Theological Studies, XIII (September, 1952), 469.

[2] A Gardeil, Le donné révélé et la théologie (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie., 1910), p. 134.
"L'assurance dialectique de certains scholastiques fait peur, comme la dextérité de prestidigitateurs qui manieraient, sans en connaître le prix, des objets d'art précieux et fragiles. Seul le vrai philosophe et le vrai théologien rassurent, parce que l'on sent, qu'à travers les échanges dialectiques, transperce sans cesse, devant leur regard intellectuel, l'altitude inaccessible de l'Etre divin."

in traditional presentations of St. Thomas' teaching. Seldom is it mentioned that the teaching about God in the Summa theologica begins with these words, "We are not capable of knowing what God is but we can know what He is not." Pieper claims to know of no textbook of Thomistic thought that gives the following idea from St. Thomas' commentary on the De trinitate of Boethius (I, 2 ad 1); there are three degrees in our knowledge of God: the knowledge of God as he is active in creation, the recognition of God as mirrored in spiritual beings, and the recognition of God as the Unknown, tamquam ignotum.[1] Over a long span of years, Sertillanges has been a leader in emphasizing the negative element in St. Thomas' doctrine insisting, "We do not know what God is; we do not know this to any degree, and we cannot give any definition of God, not even a partial one."[2]

Few are the neo-scholastics who dare to use the word agnosticism with reference to St. Thomas. C. B. Daly while admitting to a "certain agnosticism" in St. Thomas' account of our natural knowledge of the divine nature, prefers to speak of Charles Journet's "dark knowledge" of God. On the other hand, Sertillanges states, "St. Thomas, in his own quiet way, boldly uses agnosticism."[3] Sertillanges asserts unequivocally that Aquinas sacrifices all value of definition in the formulas in which

---

[1] Josef Pieper, The Silence of St. Thomas, trans. John Murray and Daniel O'Connor (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1957), p. 64.

[2] S. Thomas d'Aquin, Somme théologique, Vol. II: Dieu ... , 382. "Nous ne savons pas ce que Dieu est; nous ne le savons à aucun degré, et nous ne pouvons donner de Dieu aucune définition, même partielle.

[3] Sertillanges, Foundations . . . , p. 58.

the divine is expressed. He does not hesitate to speak of an agnosticism of definition in order to emphasize man's inability to give an adequate definition of God.

Sertillanges has been criticized for exaggerated efforts to adapt St. Thomas to modern nonscholastic thought. In his review of Sertillanges' two volume philosophical synthesis S. Thomas d'Aquin Picavet conceded that Sertillanges' interpretations are substantiated by texts from St. Thomas.[1] Sertillanges' style is clear, vigorous and provocative in its audacity. Precision but not orthodoxy is sacrificed in the effort to win a hearing among his contemporaries. Because he is preoccupied with contemporary thinking, he tries to relate Thomistic theses to the modern philosophical mentality. In doing so, he emphasizes the partial obscurity of some doctrines and frequently refers to the element of mystery. A constantly recurring theme in his writings is the impossibility of defining the nature of God. Man's inability to formulate an essential definition of the divine being is the pivotal point of Sertillanges' approach to God.

2. Reply to some critics

C. B. Daly points out and criticizes one of the most controversial statements of Sertillanges.[2] Because the content of this paragraph has been under attack by many of Sertillanges' critics we shall study it here

---

[1] François Picavet, "S. Thomas d'Aquin," (Review) Revue philosophique, LXXI (1911), 103.

[2] C. B. Daly, "The Knowableness of God," Philosophical Studies, IX (1957), 129.

to show the difficulty of judging Père Sertillanges' teaching without considering all aspects of it. The following paragraph is Daly's translation of the paragraph that he then subjects to analysis.

> We do not know in any manner or in any respect or in any degree what God is. We know that He is. But in the proposition "God is," the word "is" does not signify real being, or being considered after the manner of an attribute; it is only the logical bond of a true proposition. We use it here in a sense no different from that in which we might use it of a non-existing thing, as when we say for example "blindness is." The proposition, "God is" is a true proposition, not as qualifying God in the way of His being, but as requiring God because of the exigencies of created being. He Who is, the best of His names, is therefore, not properly His name; it is only the name of creatures.[1]

Daly declares that there is exaggeration here and even error if the words are understood strictly. The second part of the assertion, he says, seems to ignore the utterly privileged and unique role possessed among the "names of creatures" by the word "being." "To affirm it can be to transcend finite being entirely to deny it is to pose non-being simply. To say 'God is' can be to name God by something He really is; to say 'God is not' is to say nothing at all is God."[2]

Maritain too attacks Sertillanges' statement, "He who is . . .

---

[1]S. Thomas d'Aquin, Somme théologique, Vol II: Dieu ... 383.
"Nous ne savons donc nullement, en rien, à aucun degré, ce que Dieu est. Nous savons qu'il est; mais dans cette proposition: Dieu est, le verbe être ne signifie point l'être réel, l'être considéré à la façon d'un attribut; il n'est que le lien logique d'une proposition vraie et on l'emploi dans un sens qui se trouverait tout aussi authentique s'il s'agissait d'une chose sans existence réelle, comme lorsqu'on dit: La cécité est. (Qu. 7e De potentia, art. 2, rep. 1), Cette affirmation: Dieu est, est une affirmation vraie, non comme qualifiant Dieu au titre de l'être; mais comme exigeant Dieu en se fondant sur l'être. (Ibid.) Celui qui est, le meilleur de ses noms, n'est donc pas proprement son nom; ce n'est qu'un nom de créature."

[2]Daly, "The Knowableness of God," p. 129.

is but the name of a creature," and says that it is completely ambiguous.[1] In defense of Sertillanges, Gilson replies that the statement should rather be considered provocative, being wrong only in taking for granted that St. Thomas' teaching is understood. The words "he who is," according to Gilson, were fashioned to designate everything else but God. The phrase quantum ad modum significandum applies first of all to creatures, but what it signifies belongs primarily to God, the pure act of existing. Maritain points out this distinction when in fact Sertillanges' statement is based on it. Gilson adds, "Maritain seems to forget that if, from the time they are first given, the names we attribute to God are creatures' names, the concepts corresponding to them in thought remain to the end concepts of creatures."[2]

Daly points to Penido's vigorous criticism of Sertillanges and cites his argument that the use of the verb to be as the logical link of a true proposition presupposes in an existential proposition the real existence of the subject as an existence somehow apprehended and asserted. Daly concludes that the whole causal affirmative negative dialectic of the affirmation "God is" puts it beyond question that we are always and only asserting, "God is transcendently."[3]

The better to understand the paragraph under discussion, let us place it in fuller context and also review some of the salient points of

---

[1]Jacques Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge, newly translated from the fourth French edition under Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 428.

[2]Etienne Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, trans. L. K. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 458.

[3]Daly, "The Knowableness of God," p. 130.

Sertillanges' approach to being. Immediately preceding the paragraph in question, Sertillanges quotes and then comments on these words of St. Thomas from the First Book of the Sentences:

> When we advance toward God by way of exclusion we first negate of Him all corporeal perfection, and then also intellectual perfections themselves in the form that they are found in creatures, as for instance, goodness and wisdom. Then there remains in our intellect only this and nothing more: He is. But finally we deny of Him this very being in the form that it is found in creatures, and thus He rests in a kind of night of ignorance that unites us to God in the most perfect way possible in this life.[1]

From these thoughts Père Sertillanges concludes that every element of definition is excluded, even being. "God," he says, "is not a being, in the human sense of the word, he is the Source of being."[2] If he were a being, he would assume one or another of the qualities of being or all of them, for being is attributed only to those things that fall within the ten categories of being. In the first instance we would have anthropomorphism, since God would be limited. In the second instance, because God would assume all the qualities of being, there would be a question of pantheism.[3]

Whenever part of Sertillanges' thought is evaluated, his whole intent must be considered. In this instance Sertillanges is excluding

---

[1] In I Sent., d. 8 q. 1, a. 1, r. 4.
"Quando in Deum procedimus per viam remotionis, primo negamus ab eo corporalia; et secundo etiam intellectualia, secundum quod inveniuntur in creaturis, ut bonitas et sapientia; et tunc remanet tantum in intellectu nostro, quia est, et nihil amplius. Ad ultimum autem etiam hoc ipsum esse, secundum quod est in creaturis, ab ipso removemus; et tunc remanet in quadam tenebra ignorantiae, secundum quam ignorantiam, quantum ad statum viae pertinet, optime Deo conjungimur.

[2] S. Thomas d'Aquin, Somme théologique, Vol. II: Dieu, 383.

[3] Ibid.

being as an adequate definition of God. It should be recalled that Sertillanges maintains that the statement "God is" is a judgment of existence, not of nature. He admits that the statement that "God is" holds true as opposed to the atheistic statement that "God is not." However, it is also true to say "God is not" to signify that he is not included in the categories of being. God is not in being, rather being is in God. God transcends the transcendental notion of being.[1]

C. Conclusion

Each epoch elicits new responses to the problem of God. It is not a matter of formulating a new doctrine about God but rather of focusing attention on a different aspect of the divinity in response to contemporary needs.

Within the teaching of St. Thomas there is a wealth of thought concerning the mystery of God that should be clothed in the language of the day and fashioned to the needs of the time. It is our conclusion that Père Sertillanges has made a substantial contribution to twentieth century Thomism by emphasizing a definitional agnosticism within the teaching of St. Thomas. Over the years he has refined rather than changed his interpretation of St. Thomas. A man of lesser repute and ability would have had great difficulty in withstanding the criticism engendered by his provocative manner of exposing Aquinas' thought.

There is a strong negative element in the doctrine of St. Thomas that is frequently ignored or mitigated. Gilson declares that one

---

[1]Sertillanges, La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin, I, 173.

betrays the deepest intention of Aquinas by not letting negative theology have the last word.[1] Were the negative theology of St. Thomas Aquinas better known, followers of thinkers like Barth, Brunner and Tillich might perhaps be more kindly disposed toward natural theology and a meeting ground for theists might be established. A growing number of men in the twentieth century assert that God is silent, eclipsed, absent, absurd or dead. The unknown God of St. Thomas could help them grasp that the divine being must be sought and that the least knowledge "about the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained of lesser things."[2]

Recognition of Sertillanges' leadership in stressing the negative way of St. Thomas in his approach to God points to the need for further investigation in this area. A chronological study of Aquinas' texts concerning man's knowledge of God would afford Thomists better understanding of the evolution of his thought. It would also allow for a more authentic integration of the ways of causality, negation, and eminence and for a deeper comprehension of Thomas' declaration, "We cannot grasp what God is, but only what he is not and how other things are related to him."[3]

---

[1] Etienne Gilson, Elements of Christian Philosophy (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1960), p. 144.

[2] S.T., I, 5, ad 1.

[3] S.C.G., I, 30.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Books

Sertillanges, A. D. Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme. Paris: Bloud et Cie., 1908.

_____. Athées, mes frères. Paris: Gallimard, 1941.

_____. Catéchisme des incroyants. 2 Vols. Paris: Flammarion, 1930.

_____. Le christianisme et les philosophies. 2 Vols. Paris: Aubier, 1941.

_____. Dieu gouverne. Paris: Spes, 1942.

_____. Dieu ou rien. 2 Vols. Paris: Flammarion, 1933.

_____. Foundations of Thomistic Philosophy. Translated by Godfrey Anstruther. London: Sands and Co., 1931.

_____. Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste. Paris: Bloud Gay, 1928.

_____. L'idée de création et ses retentissement en philosophie. Paris: Aubier, 1945.

_____. The Intellectual Life. Translated by Mary Ryan. Westminister, Maryland: Newman Press, 1950.

_____. La philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin. 2 Vols. Nouvelle edition revue et augmentée de S. Thomas d'Aquin. Paris: Aubier, 1940.

_____. Le problème du mal. 2 Vols. Paris: Aubier, 1951.

_____. Les sources de la croyance en Dieu. Paris: Perrin, 1905.

_____. S. Thomas d'Aquin. 2 Vols. Paris: Alcan, 1910.

_____. S. Thomas d'Aquin. 2 Vols. 4th edition. Paris: Alcan, 1925.

_____. St. Thomas Aquinas and His Work. Translated by Godfrey Anstruther. London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1932.

Sertillanges, A. D. L'univers et l'âme. Paris: Les Editions ouvrières, 1965.

_____. La vie intellectuelle. Paris: Editions de la revue des jeunes, 1951.

Articles

Sertillanges, A. D. "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme?" Revue de philosophie, VII (1906), 129-165.

_____. "Agnosticisme ou anthropomorphisme?" 2e article. Revue de philosophie, IX (1906), 157-181.

_____. "A propos des preuves de Dieu. La troisième 'voie' thomiste," Revue de philosophie, XXV (1925), 24-37.

_____. "La connaissance de Dieu," Revue de philosophie, IX (1906), 614-625.

_____. "La contingence dans la nature selon St. Thomas d'Aquin," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, III (1909), 665-681.

_____. "La création," Revue thomiste, XXXIII (1928), 97-115.

_____. "Enquêtes de la Quinzaine," La Quinzaine, LXIV (June 1, 1905), 412-419.

_____. "Four Central Problems," The Commonweal, XLIV (July 19, 1946), 326-329.

_____. "L'idée de création dans saint Thomas d'Aquin," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, I (1907), 239-252.

_____. "L'idée générale de la connaissance d'après s. Thomas d'Aquin," Revues des science philosophiques et théologiques, II (1908), 449-465.

_____. "L'inconnaissable selon M. Fouillée," Revue thomiste, I (1893), 577-597.

_____. "The Moral Sanction," The New Scholasticism, I (1927), 49-64.

_____. "Note sur la preuve de l'existence de Dieu et l'éternité du monde," Revue thomiste, VI (1898), 367-378.

_____. "La notion de création," Revue thomiste, XXXV (1930), 48-57.

Sertillanges, A. D. "Open Philosophy, Open Society," The Commonweal, XLIV (July 5, 1946), 280-282.

_____. "Le Père Descoqs et la 'tertia via,'" Revue thomiste, IX (1926), 490-502.

_____. "La preuve de l'existence de Dieu et l'éternité du monde," Revue thomiste, V (1897), 453-468;609-626; 746-762.

_____. "Les principes de la nature selon St. Thomas d'Aquin," Revue thomiste, XVII (1909), 449-465.

_____. "La providence, la contingence et la liberté selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, III (1909), 5-16.

_____. "Réponse à M. Gardair," Revue de philosophie, X (1907), 107-108.

_____. "La sanction morale et la liberté selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, VI (1912), 213-235.

_____. "La science et les sciences spéculatives d'après s. Thomas d'Aquin," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, X (1921), 5-20.

_____. "Sur la démonstrabilité de Dieu. Comment on prouve Dieu," Revue apologétique, XLVI (1928), 385-395; 515-521.

_____. "Sur quelques caractères de la philosophie chrétienne," Philosophia perennis. Edited by F. J. Von Rintelen. Regensburg: Joseph Habbei, 1930.

_____. "S. Thomas d'Aquin, homme du temps présent," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, XIX (1930), 669-678.

Other Sources

Books

Anderson, James F. The Bond of Being: An Essay on Analogy and Existence. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1949.

_____. The Cause of Being. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1952.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. Opera omnia, iussu impensaque Leonis XIII, P. M. edita. Roma: Ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1882...

Aquinas, St. Thomas. Compendium of Theology. Translated by Cyril Vollert. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1947.

_____. On Being and Essence. Translated by Armand Maurer. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949.

_____. On the Eternity of the World. Translated by Cyril Vollert. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1964.

_____. On the Power of God. Translated by the English Dominican Fathers. Westminster: The Newman Press, 1952.

_____. Somme théologique. Vols. I-III: Dieu. Traduction française par A. D. Sertillanges. Paris: Desclée et Cie., 1926.

_____. Somme théologique. La création. I, 44-49. Traduction française par A. D. Sertillanges. Paris: Desclée et Cie., 1927.

_____. Summa contra gentiles. On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Translated by Anton C. Pegis, Vernon J. Bourke. Books I and III. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1955-1956.

_____. Summa theologica. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Vol. I. New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947.

_____. Truth. Translated by R. W. Mulligan, Vol. I: J. V. McGlynn, Vol. II: Robert W. Schmidt, Vol. III. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952-54.

Bivort de la Saudée, Jacques de. God, Man and the Universe. New York: Kenedy and Sons, 1953.

Cajetan, Thomas de Vio. The Analogy of Names. Translated by Edward A. Bushinski. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1959.

Collins, James. God in Modern Philosophy. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959.

Danielou, Jean. God and the Ways of Knowing. New York: Meridian Books, 1956.

Descoqs, Pedro. Institutiones Metaphysical Generalis. Vol. I. Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1925.

_____. Praelectiones Theologiae Naturalis. Vol. II. Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1935.

Gardeil, A. Le donné révélé et la théologie. Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1910.

Garrigou-Lagrange, Reginald. God: His Existence and His Nature. 2 Vols. Translated by Dom Bede Rose. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1934.

_____. The One God. Translated by Dom Bede Rose. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1943.

Gilson, Etienne. Elements of Christian Philosophy. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1960.

_____. The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. Translated by L. K. Shock. New York: Random House, 1956.

_____. God and Philosophy. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941.

_____. Le thomisme. Paris: Librarie philosophique J. Vrin, 1944.

Gisquière, Emmanuel. Deus dominus. 2 Vols. Paris: Beauchesne et ses fils, 1950.

Gornall, Thomas. A Philosophy of God. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1962.

Grégoire, A. Immanence et Transcendence. Paris: Desclée, 1939.

Holloway, Maurice R. An Introduction to Natural Theology. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959.

Journet, Charles. The Dark Knowledge of God. Translated by James Anderson. London: Sheed and Ward, 1948.

_____. The Meaning of Evil. Translated by Michael Barry. New York: Kenedy and Sons, 1963.

Jolivet, Regis. The God of Reason. New York: Hawthorn, 1958.

Klubertanz, George. St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960.

Lubac, Henri de. The Discovery of God. New York: Kenedy, 1960.

_____. The Drama of Atheistic Humanism. London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953.

_____. Sur les chemins de Dieu. Paris: Aubier, 1956.

Lyttkens, Hampus. The Analogy between God and the World. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1952.

Maquart, F. X. Elementa Philosophiae. Paris: Blot, 1938.

Maritain, Jacques. Approaches to God. New York: Harper, 1954.

_____. The Degrees of Knowledge. Newly translated from the fourth French edition under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,

_____. God and the Permission of Evil. Translated by Joseph W. Evans. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1966.

_____. The Range of Reason. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.

Mascall, E. L. Existence and Analogy. London: Longmans, 1949.

_____. He Who Is. A Study in Traditional Theism. London: Longmans, 1943.

Metz, Joannes B. ed. Is God Dead? Concilium. Vol. XVI. New York: Paulist Press, 1966.

Meyer, Hans. The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. Translated by Frederic Eckhoff. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1944.

Moos, F.-M. Le Père Sertillanges, maître de vie spirituelle. Bruxelles: La Pensée Catholique, 1957.

Muniz, Francisco P. The Work of Theology. Translated by John P. Reid. Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1953.

Murray, John Courtney. The Problem of God. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.

O'Brien, Thomas C. Metaphysics and the Existence of God. Washington, D.C.: Thomist Press, 1960.

Pascal, Blaise. Pensées sur la vérité de la religion chrétienne. Edited by Jacques Chevalier. Paris: J. Gabalda et fils, 1927.

Patterson, Robert Leet. The Conception of God in the Philosophy of Aquinas. London: Allen and Unwin, 1933.

Penido, M. T.-L. Le rôle de l'analogie en théologie dogmatique. Paris: Librairies philosophique J. Vrin, 1931.

Phelan, Gerald B. St. Thomas and Analogy. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1948.

Phillips, J. B. Your God is Too Small. New York: Macmillan Co., 1961.

Phillips, R. P. Modern Thomistic Philosophy. 2 Vols. Westminster: Newman Press, 1962.

Pieper, Josef. The Silence of St. Thomas. Translated by John Murray and Daniel O'Connor. New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1957.

Pradines, Maurice. Notice sur la vie et les oeuvres du r.p. Antonin Sertillanges. Paris: Didot, 1951.

Sillem, Edward. Ways of Thinking About God. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961.

Siwek, Paul. The Philosophy of Evil. New York: Ronald Press Co., 1951.

Steenberghen, Fernand van. Hidden God. Translated by Theodore Crowley. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1966.

Thonnard, F. J. A Short History of Philosophy. Translated by Edward A. Maziarz. New York: Desclée et Cie., 1956.

Tresmontant, Claude. Christian Metaphysics. Translated by Gerard Slevin. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965.

Various Authors. "The Existence and Nature of God," Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association. Vol. XXVIII, 1954.

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. The God Question and Modern Man. Translated by Hilda Graef. New York: Seabury Press, 1967.

Ward, Leo R. God and World Order: A Study in Ends of Nature. St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1961.

Weigel Gustave, and Madden, Arthur G. Religion and the Knowledge of God. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1961.

White, Victor. God the Unknown. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956.

Articles

Baisnée, Jules A. "St. Thomas Aquinas's Proofs of the Existence of God Presented in Their Chronological Order," Philosophical Studies in Honor of Very Reverend Ignatius Smith, O.P. Edited by John K Ryan. Westminster: The Newman Press, 1952.

Balthasar, M. "Deux guides dans l'étude du thomisme," (Review of St. Thomas d'Aquin), Revue néo-scholastique de philosophie, XVIII (1911), 101-107.

Blanche, F. A. "L'analogie," Revue de philosophie, XXIII (1925), 248-270.

Boulanger, A. B. "Le semi-agnosticisme du P. Sertillanges et le thomisme du R. P. Romeyer," Revue thomiste, XIII (1930), 158-189.

Carpenter, Hilary, O.P. "The Philosophical Approach to God," The Thomist, I (1939), 45-61.

Chollet, A. "Analogie," Dictionnaire de théologie catholique. Edited by A. Vacant, E. Mangenot et E. Amann. I-1 (1923), cols. 1142-1154.

Chossat, M. "Dieu, son existence et connaissance naturelle de," Dictionnaire de theéologie catholique, ed. A. Vacant, E. Mangenot et E. Amann, IV-1 (1924), cols. 874-948.

Collins, James. "Le problème du mal," (Review), Theological Studies, XIII (1952), 469-470.

Daly, C. B. "The Knowableness of God," Philosophical Studies, IX (1957), 90-137.

Descoqs, Pedro. "Les derniers écrits du P. Geny," Archives de philosophie, III (1925), 96-137.

_____. "S. Thomas et le thomisme," Archives de philosophie, X (1934), 595-643.

_____. "Une synthèse du P. Sertillanges," (Review of Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste), Archives de philosophie, VI (1928), 114-131.

Finili, Antoninus. "Is There a Philosophical Approach to God?" Dominican Studies, IV (1951), 80-101.

Gardair, J. "La connaissance de Dieu," Revue de philosophie, IX (1906), 445-470.

_____. "L'Etre divin," Revue de philosophie, VIII (1906), 599-626.

_____. "La transcendence de Dieu," Revue de philosophie, X (1907), 93-106.

Geny, Paul. "A propos des preuves thomistes de l'existence de Dieu," Revue de philosophie, XXIV (1924), 575-601.

Klubertanz, G., S.J. "Being and God According to Contemporary Scholastics," Modern Schoolman, XXXII (1954), 1-17.

Manser, G. M. "Das Wesen des Thomismus," Divus Thomas, VII (1929), 373-398.

Masiello, Ralph J. "The Analogy of Proportion according to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas," The Modern Schoolman. XXXV (January, 1958), 91-105.

Moos, M.-F. "Un maître de la vie spirituelle, le très révérend Père Sertillanges, O.P.," La vie spirituelle, LXXX (1949), 607-623.

Motte, A. R. "Théodicée et théologie chez S. Thomas d'Aquin," Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, XXVI (1937), 5-26.

Nielly, J. B. "Père Sertillanges," Cross and Crown, II (1950), 361-368.

"Obituary," Editorial. The Tablet, CXCII (August 7, 1948), 92.

Owens, Joseph. "Theodicy, Natural Theology and Metaphysics," Modern Schoolman, XXVIII (1951), 126-37.

Picavet, François. "S. Thomas," (Review), Revue philosophique, LXXI (1911), 96-104.

Pinard, H. "Création," Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, ed. A. Vacant, E. Mangenot et E. Amann, III-2 (1938), cols. 2034-2201.

Rabut, A. "Le problème du mal," Vol. II. "La solution," (Review), Bulletin thomiste, VIII (1952), 319-326.

Romeyer, Blaise. "St. Augustin," Archives de philosophie, VI (1928), 606-633.

Rousselot, Pierre. "L'esprit de s. Thomas," (Review of S. Thomas d'Aquin), Etudes, CXXVII (5 avril, 1911), 614-629.

Ryan, Columba. "God and Analogy," Blackfriars, XXV (April, 1944), 137-143.

_____. "The Reach of Analogical Argument," Dominican Studies, I-V (1951), 103-18.

Smith, G. "Before You Start Talking about God," Modern Schoolman, XXIII (1945), 24-43.

Steenberghen, Fernand van. "Le problème philosophique de l'existence de Dieu," Revue philosophique de Louvain, XLV (1947), 5-20; 141-168; 301-313.

Taymans, F. "Le problème du mal," Vol. I. (Review), Nouvelle revue théologique, LXXI (1949), 987-988.

Thyrion, Jacques. "La notion de création passive," Revue thomiste, XXXIV (1929), 303-19.

Tobin, T. "Rev. Antonin Gilbert Sertillanges," Liguorian, XLIII (1955), 380.

White, Victor. "Prolegomena to the Five Ways," Dominican Studies, V (1952), 134-58.